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The Lifetime Experiences of Being Labeled “Gifted”: Case Studies of Adults Who
Participated in a 1959 Public School Gifted Program

by

John R. Beckerle

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Education

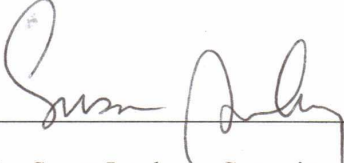
School of Education

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Dr. Susan Isenberg, Committee Chair

10-18-13

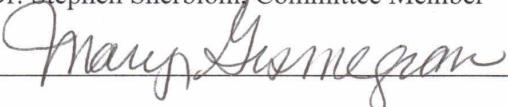
Date



Dr. Stephen Sherblom, Committee Member

10-18-13

Date



Professor Mary Gismegian, Committee Member

10-18-13

Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: John R. Beckerle

Signature: John R. Beckerle Date: 10/18/2013

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I thank my son Chris for his support and his unique understanding of what I was trying to accomplish. I also thank my daughter-in-law Andrea, who is also working on her dissertation, for the conversations we had about our work. Most importantly I want to thank my wife Rose who I love very much. She has supported me throughout my academic journey. Lastly, I want to thank my Mom and Dad. And to my Dad who I know is looking down on me. I want to paraphrase a few words from a local brewery in South St. Louis. This degree's for you, Pop!

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the current perceptions of adults who were enrolled in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in the fall of 1959 or spring of 1960. At this time in history the Cold War was a reality and the U.S. enacted the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) to find talented young people and give them the opportunity to excel academically. The program in this research was already in place when the NDEA was put into effect. A pool of 62 potential subjects was identified and 33 accepted the invitation to participate. The research question was, “How did the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program contribute to the lived experience of the students who started in the program in 1959 and 1960?”

A multiple case study method was determined to be the best fit for this study. Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone or by e-mail. From the interview transcriptions, the story of each case contributed to a bigger story of all the cases.

After completing the interviews and data analysis, seven themes emerged: expectations, social, label, spiritual/religious, impact, lack of high school support, and lifetime well-being. Another significant finding was that approximately 90% graduated college with at least a two-year degree at a time when less than 52% of high school graduates even attended college, albeit the enriching primary school pull-out program experience was followed by a less-than-enriching secondary school experience that lacked academic and college advising.

The participants had an overall positive opinion of their lived experience of being labeled gifted. The most salient finding was their life satisfaction, with an implication that positive labeling and a subsequent self-fulfilling prophesy contributed to it. Further

research should be conducted on the relationship between positive labeling and life satisfaction with students not identified as gifted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

In recent years, there has been much effort expended in preserving natural resources such as oil and timber reserves, wildlife habitat, and clean water because of previous neglect and political pressure. And due to economic conditions, budget constraints, and political pressure, gifted students represent another resource being neglected. The No Child Left Behind Act enacted in 2001 is an educational reform plan based on a four pronged approach: “stronger statewide accountability for students’ proficiency, increased flexibility for state and local control in the use of government education funds, expanded school options for parents, and an emphasis on proven teaching methods” (“Gifted 101,” 2008, p. 1). The act also uses a broader definition of giftedness based on high achievement—not just academically but in creativity, leadership abilities, or specific academic fields. However, the results of this well-intentioned legislation may not have accomplished all that was expected of it.

By reducing the funding of gifted programs to increase the funding of underperforming student programs or perhaps eliminating gifted programs all together, school districts seem to have made the assumption that gifted students will be fine, that they are smart enough to learn what they want to learn on their own.

Statement of the Problem

Gifted programs have evolved over time in this country and each has been unique in its design and sustainability based on stakeholder support, designer creativity, funding, and political climate. Typically, gifted programs are evaluated from the perspective of those who are educated in the field. There is no guide for how to design a gifted

program that is informed by the perception of those who experienced it years earlier. Many American students have been or are currently being educated in gifted programs. Student perceptions of lifelong effects of being labeled gifted and participating in a particular gifted program that is described in detail is lacking. Some districts practice ability grouping or tracking, while others focus on detracking, preferring to offer the same educational opportunities to all students regardless of ability. Some districts design pull-out programs where gifted students are given the opportunity to be with other gifted students for perhaps an hour a day or one day a week. Understanding the student perceptions of the lifelong effects of one unique gifted program from the past that labeled them gifted could inform designers of gifted programs of the future—what were the perceived strengths to build on and the perceived weaknesses to address.

As a student selected to be part of a gifted program in the St. Louis Public Schools, I reflected on my lived experience of being labeled gifted and participating in a gifted program as a child and I wanted to investigate the reflections of other students in the same program to make meaning of the shared experience and its effect then and lifelong. The focus of this research was narrowed to a gifted program that started in the 1950s in the St. Louis Public Schools, of which I became a part in 1959. I foreshadowed the stories of their lives based on the story of my life—satisfying and successful, but side stories emerged that resulted in new insights not only about the unique program but about me that could be used to inform current educators and program organizers of gifted children.

The gifted program in the St. Louis Public School system began in 1956. This research explored the 50-year lived experiences of participants who started the gifted

program as fifth graders in the fall of 1959 or spring of 1960. During the 1960-1961 school year, the gifted students were put in completely segregated classrooms from fifth through eighth grade in several different grade schools in the southern part of St. Louis, Missouri. After eighth grade, the gifted program was no longer a pull-out program, but instead was part of a tracking program in high school. In other words, gifted high school students were placed in regular classrooms with regular teachers. Students sometimes found themselves in classes with much older, less motivated students. This “culture shock” manifested itself in various ways from casual kidding to rather harsh teasing from classmates not in the gifted program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the current perceptions of a group of adults who were enrolled in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in the fall of 1959 or spring of 1960 on the lifetime experience of being labeled gifted and having participated in a new and unique gifted program with its strengths and weaknesses. A pool of 62 potential subjects who had participated in the gifted program was identified and 33 accepted the invitation to be interviewed for this study. Not all of them participated in the gifted program uninterrupted from fifth grade through high school; however, all the participants graduated from the same high school in 1967 and all the participants started in the gifted program during the 1959-1960 school year and participated in it for most of the time from 1960 to 1967. Though a few opted out of the high school tracking program, all participated fully at the elementary level. The participants were asked questions pertaining to their experiences, both good and bad,

while in the program. They were also asked about any long-term effects of the program on them and their relationships with other people at the time and throughout their lives.

Research Question

How did the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program contribute to the lived experience of the students who started in the program in 1959 and 1960?

Significance of the Study

Higher IQ students have special needs, just as lower IQ or disabled students, in areas of social issues, motivational issues, and educational needs (Cloud, 2007). By exploring perceptions of adults who participated in a gifted program as a child, such as the one described in this research, I will add to the discussion of gifted education that may increase the understanding of lifelong effects of being labeled gifted and participating in a new and unique gifted program. Cloud (2007) argued that society benefits if the high-IQ students' special needs are addressed with the same funding and resources as the lower IQ students. Stakeholders of gifted programs (parents of gifted children, administrators and designers of such programs, teachers in such programs, university gifted teacher education program organizers) may be interested in the results of this research.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is based on the reflective thoughts of 33 participants of a gifted program in the St. Louis public school system during the 1950's and 60's and includes reflection and narrative analysis, positive labeling, and self-fulfilling prophesy. The reflective nature of this study (the 50 year recollections of a group of students in a specific gifted program) and the analysis of their responses to the

questions provide a collective glimpse of the effect of the program and all that goes with it (e.g., being labeled gifted) on their lives. According to Riesman (1993), “The purpose [of reflection and narrative analysis] is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (p. 2). As each interview was analyzed, individual views began to form distinctive patterns and those patterns added to the collective view of the gifted program and of being labeled gifted. “And from the analysis of the responses, subjective interpretations can be made” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 4). From these interpretations and the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies (Merton, 1948), I predicted that the study subjects would think of their lives as enriched and successful because of the gifted labeling early in life.

Limitations

Two key limitations to the study were the instruments (questionnaire and interview questions) and the generalizability of results—the questionnaire and interview questions were not proven reliable and valid and generalizability of the results was limited because of the uniqueness of the program. There were other limitations. The first was finding the participants. I identified 62 possible participants and locating them after nearly 50 years was a challenge. After locating as many as possible and calling them for verbal consent, I had 33 who were willing to participate in this study. Another possible limitation was the lack of diversity in the study group. The 62 potential participants were all Caucasians. This was because of the demographics of the city of St. Louis during that time. Another limitation, which directly influenced answers to the interview questions, was the time span between participation in the gifted program and the time of the interviews. This group of participants was tested for this program in fourth grade and

started the gifted program in fifth grade in the fall of 1959 or the spring of 1960. Recollections sometimes fade over the course of some 50 years and some may become embellished or forgotten altogether. There was a learning curve to the interview process for me. The first few interviews had interjected comments from me due to my own excitement when talking about not only their experiences, but mine as well. The last limitation had to do with geography and availability. Participants were scattered around the country and although preferred, personal interviews were many times impossible. Phone interviews were the first alternative and were chosen by some while others preferred to do the interview by e-mail.

One threat to internal validity was researcher bias—researcher bias because I was a participant in the gifted program and had my preconceived notions and memories of how it felt to be labeled gifted and to have the gifted program as a life experience, and reactivity because I may have influenced the interviewees with my presence as one of their classmates from years ago. I realize that this bias probably also affected my interpretation of the interviews to some degree but being cognoscente of the bias forced me to be more vigilant about the possible influence it may have on my research.

The effect of me conducting the interviews on the interviewees was not controlled for, but understanding it was helpful in my discussion of the results. Another internal threat was subject characteristics (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Those classmates who agreed to be interviewed may have been those who felt good about their lives after participating in a gifted program as a child. Classmates who did not agree to be interviewed may have been those who did not feel good about their lives. Most important

to this study was my understanding of the limitations and how they might affect conclusions drawn from the findings.

Definition of Terms

Ability Grouping - Class or group assignment based on observed behavior or performance. Ability grouping is not the same as tracking (National Association for Gifted Children, 2011, para. 1).

Accelerated Learning - A strategy for progressing through education at rates faster or ages younger than the norm (NAGC, 2011, para. 2).

Accountability - Holding students, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel responsible for instructional outcomes (NAGC, 2011, para. 3).

Aptitude - An inclination to excel in the performance of a certain skill (NAGC, 2011, para. 6).

At Risk - A term used to describe students whose economic, physical, emotional, or academic needs go unmet or serve as barriers to talent recognition or development, thus putting them in danger of underachieving or dropping out (NAGC, 2011, para. 8).

Concurrent or Dual Enrollment - Most often refers to high school students taking college courses, often for college credit. Dual enrollment is viewed as providing high school students benefits such as greater access to a wider range of rigorous academic and technical courses, savings in time and money on a college degree, promoting efficiency of learning, and enhancing admission to and retention in college. The terms may also be used to refer to middle grade students taking high school courses and earning credit towards graduation (NAGC, 2011, para. 13).

Creativity - The process of developing new, uncommon, or unique ideas. The federal definition of giftedness identifies creativity as a specific component of giftedness (NAGC, 2011, para. 15).

Curriculum Compacting - After showing a level of proficiency in the basic curriculum, a student can then be allowed to exchange instructional time for other learning experiences (NAGC, 2011, para. 17).

Differentiation - Modifying curriculum and instruction according to content, pacing, and/or product to meet unique student needs in the classroom (NAGC, 2011, para. 18).

Enrichment - Activities that add to or go beyond the existing curriculum. Activities may occur in the classroom or in a separate setting (NAGC, 2011, para. 19).

Gifted and Talented Students - Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act defines gifted and talented students as

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities. (NAGC, 2011, para. 21)

Many states and districts follow the federal definition.

Intelligence - The ability to learn, reason and problem solve. Debate revolves around the nature of intelligence as to whether it is an innate quality or something that is developed as a result of interacting with the environment. Many researchers believe that it is a combination of the two (NAGC, 2011, para. 26).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) - A numerical representation of intelligence. IQ is derived by dividing mental age (as determined by an intelligence test) by chronological age and multiplying by 100. Traditionally, an average IQ is considered to be 100 (NAGC, 2011, para. 27).

Learning Styles - Preferred way(s) in which individuals interact or process new information across the three domains of learning identified in the taxonomy of education objectives: cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills), and affective (attitude). An individual's preferred learning style is how he/she learns best (NAGC, 2011, para. 29).

Pullout Program - A program that takes a student out of the regular classroom during the school day for special programming (NAGC, 2011, para. 35).

Social-Emotional Needs - Gifted and talented students may have affective needs that include heightened or unusual sensitivity to self-awareness, emotions, and expectations of themselves or others, and a sense of justice, moral judgment, or altruism (NAGC, 2011, para. 37).

Underachieving or Underachievement - A term used to describe the discrepancy between a student's performance and their potential, or ability to perform at a much higher level (NAGC, 2011, para. 42)

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The literature review revealed only a small amount of information on the earliest years of gifted education in the U.S. There is evidence that St. Louis, the city whose gifted program is at the center of this study, was a leader in gifted education. As early as 1868, the city's superintendent of schools, Dr. William T. Harris, had discussed the advantages of promoting pupils for short intervals and of accelerating gifted pupils through the grades (ERIC Clearinghouse, 2002). In 1955, St. Louis was again at the forefront as the city's public schools began "a program designed to give special educational opportunities to gifted students" ("New Project to Begin," 1955). A group of students who were participants of the program in the St. Louis Public Schools were asked questions about their experiences as participants in the program and about the effect of being labeled "gifted" on their lives. The framing literature was reviewed on the following topics: history of gifted education, giftedness, gifted adults, world giftedness, world math and science rankings, the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program of the 1950's, reflection, and self-fulfilling prophecy.

History of Gifted Education

After World War II, critics and reformers of the American education system produced a substantial amount of information detailing the shortcomings of the country's educational system (Clowse, 1981). This criticism seemed to be confirmed when, in the fall of 1957, the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik I*, the first manmade satellite. Suddenly, the Russians seemed to have made a great leap beyond the capabilities of the U.S. and the perceived threat from America's cold war enemy became very real. This thought brought great fear to the minds of many Americans and inspired the feeling that the nation needed

to rapidly improve its scientific and technological abilities (Clowse, 1981). The national government needed to respond quickly to this crisis to restore the country's confidence. The government needed to discern why the country was behind in the space race, and a consensus grew that the school systems were largely to blame for this defeat (Clowse, 1981).

Federal aid to education had long been discussed. However, problems such as integration, religion, and a simple fear of centralized control of education blocked many earlier attempts to raise education to a level of national concern (Clowse, 1981). Many found it unconscionable that by 1957 the federal government had not taken greater financial responsibility for education, but those opposed to federal involvement were willing to use everything in their power to prevent that breakthrough (Clowse, 1981). As the debate continued in 1957, Sputnik II was launched by Russia. The Sputnik panic gave the advocates of federal aid to education the edge they wanted, and eventually the crisis transformed the politics of federal aid to education. The Cold War dictated that the U.S. mobilize her brainpower at the elementary, high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels. The American public was of the opinion "that the nation's scientific leadership, perhaps even survival, depended upon changing its educational institutions" (Clowse, 1981, p. 105).

In 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) using similar language as is used today in order to "strengthen our American system of education so that it can meet broad and increasing demands imposed upon it by considerations of basic national security" (Lips & McNeill, 2009, p. 15). The NDEA was passed because of the growing concern about American security and

competitiveness in the wake of the Soviet Union's launch of the *Sputnik* satellite (Lips & McNeill, 2009, p. 14). The support was in the form of new benefits for college students and support for elementary and secondary schools to improve science, math, and foreign language instruction. This act set legislative precedent to provide aid to public and private schools at all levels, although it was not as sweeping as some had hoped (Clowse, 1981).

Gifted Children

One important step in gifted education is deciding who will be identified as gifted. Definitions of giftedness vary, with some professionals basing the definition on high scores on intelligence tests and others basing it on scholastic achievement (i.e., working above grade level) or unusual accomplishment (i.e., a child doing work at the adult level) ("Gifted 101," 2008, p. 1). In 1971, former U.S. commissioner of education Sydney P. Marland Jr. stated that gifted and talented children were "capable of high performance" and required "differential educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society" ("Gifted 101," 2008, p. 1).

Regardless of the specific definition used, most professionals agree that, because their intellectual development differs from that of their age peers, gifted children have unique educational requirements ("Gifted 101," 2008). Programs may be integrated into the regular school curriculum or replace the regular curriculum in part or entirely. Gifted children often have unique learning styles, and some characteristics of giftedness can be interpreted as problems in the regular classroom ("Gifted 102," 2008). For gifted students whose needs are not met in the schools, options may include distance learning

and homeschooling (“Gifted 102,” 2008). Gifted education can take many different forms, and no single program may be right for all learners (“Gifted 102,” 2008).

Other programs for the gifted have also shown some success. Acceleration and enrichment, curriculum compacting, advanced placement, and pullout programs have all had success (NAGC, 2011). Acceleration advances students to higher levels of study, which are more suited to their abilities. Skipping grades and accelerating the curriculum are forms of these programs. In partial acceleration, a student may advance in one area while maintaining other coursework suitable for his or her age or ability. According to Kulik (1992), students in accelerated classes can out pace other same-aged and same-IQ students, from non-accelerated classes, on achievement tests by one year. In a 2002 study, students who were allowed early entrance to elementary school averaged six months ahead in achievement and had better self-esteem and were better socialized when compared to their same-age peers during the same year (Rogers, 2002). Enrichment programs are designed to give gifted students who are in traditional classroom settings supplemental material to challenge them. Kulik (1992) noted, “Talented students from enriched classes outperform initially equivalent students from conventional classes by four to five months on grade equivalent scales” (p. 77).

Curriculum compacting is when students who can show mastery of a subject are allowed to pursue other learning opportunities. Using curriculum compacting, 24-70% of the curriculum of high ability students can be eliminated and not affect their performance or test scores (Reis & Purcell, 1993). In *Tools for Schools*, the U.S. Department of Education reported the positive effects of the compacting process on teachers and students and the variety of settings where compacting can be utilized (U.S. DOE, 1998).

Advanced placement is a program that has become increasingly more important to college bound students during the last decade. Along with the increased popularity of AP credits, the academic success of the students taking the courses followed. Students completing two or more advanced placement courses have a 76% chance of completing their undergraduate degree while those taking one advanced placement course only have a 59% chance of completing a bachelor degree. African-American and Hispanic students who just attempt an AP course in high school are three times more likely to complete their bachelor degree. And perhaps more revealing, students who do not attempt any advanced placement coursework only have a 33% chance of graduating with their bachelor degree (Adelman, 1999).

Programs that allow students to leave the regular classroom setting for certain periods of the day or week are referred to as pullout programs. These classes allow the student to experience more challenging subjects, to express more creativity or to pique their interest in subjects that may not be covered in the traditional classroom. Vaughn, Feldhausen, and Asher (1991) stated that participants in pullout programs develop better critical thinking skills, are more creative, and achieve more because of their participation. Pullout programs come in many forms. Students may attend programs for a half-day, one full day a week, or an hour a day. The remainder of the student's school week would be in the traditional classroom with same-grade students. Specialized coursework is designed for students who show a great propensity for a particular subject and has proven to be very successful. "Over 99% of the students in specialized math and science high schools went on to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, with over 50% of the students continuing in challenging science or math fields" (Thomas, 2000, p. 5). Because of

budgetary constraints and the standards-based requirements, many states have been forced to cut the already limited amount of gifted programs, forcing an ever-growing number of families to look at alternatives for their gifted children. One program alternative is homeschooling. Homeschooling encompasses a variety of options: (a) school at home, (b) part-time school at home, (c) mentors, and (d) tutors at home (Nationmaster.com, 2009).

As in any endeavor, statistics are either important or ignored, and this seems to be true in education as well. Tracking or ability grouping have proponents and detractors, and both sides' present statistics to support their beliefs. According to Fischer (2004, para. 2), self-contained, ability-grouped elementary math and reading students fare very well and show significant achievement gains across grade levels. But at the secondary level, the debate is less black and white. Lower ability students do better in mixed class settings and poorer in low-ability-group class settings. However, the reverse seems to be the case for the high-ability students, who "stagnate in the heterogeneously mixed classes, but thrive in classes with students of equal ability" (Fischer, 2004, para. 2).

Swiatek (2001) argued that gifted students benefit from ability grouping because the specialized instruction they receive allows them to learn at an accelerated pace. These students may also experience social benefits from ability grouping, as they are more likely to fit in with other gifted students than with average or below-average students. Without opportunities for advanced instruction, gifted students may become bored with the regular curriculum and experience academic problems.

Summarizing the findings of several meta-analytic studies in the literature related to ability grouping, Kulik (1992) found the effects of ability grouping vary depending on

the specific type of program being used (para. 3). These programs follow one of three basic strategies: (a) the same curriculum is used for all ability groups, (b) the curriculum is adjusted for each group based on ability, or (c) adjustments in curriculum and other features are made specifically for the high-ability students. When students are grouped based on test scores and school records and all groups follow the same curriculum (known as XYZ grouping), little or no improvement in achievement is seen (Kulik, 1992, para. 4). On a grade-equivalent scale, students in the top groups in these programs tend to outperform their non-grouped peers by only about one month. In programs that make adjustments to the curriculum based on ability, students outperform their non-grouped peers by two or three months on a grade-equivalent scale. The programs with the most adjustment to the curriculum (those that use enrichment and acceleration) also show the greatest effects; students in those programs outperform their peers by almost one year on a grade-equivalent scale (Kulik, 1992). Based on these findings, Kulik (1992) recommended that schools maintain programs of acceleration and enrichment and utilize grouping programs that adjust the curriculum based on ability, as programs with adjusted curricula tend to benefit students of all levels.

Pasquini (2002) outlined the positive and negative aspects of tracking or ability grouping in schools. The positive aspects for students include a wider range of classes and the ability for gifted students to take high-level classes. For teachers, the positives included being familiar with and trained for this type of program and being able to teach the same basic curriculum but in more depth with gifted students. Among the negative aspects Pasquini (2002) identified was the programs' tendency to favor upper- and middle-class White students at the expense of minorities, especially African Americans,

who may be placed unfairly in lower tracks. Tracking could also encourage students to associate mostly with those in their own ability group and discriminate against those in other groups, and could limit the expectations of students in the lower groups.

In discussing the possibility of de-tracking schools, Pasquini (2002) wrote that making this change could foster social harmony, offer equal opportunity to all students and increase expectations of lower ability students, and encourage parental involvement. However, de-tracking might also slow the success of gifted students. Pasquini (2002) argued that teachers might lower the expectations of gifted students to meet those of the lower performing students and that the lower students may be subject to unfair discipline. In addition, some parents might be unwilling to take on the increased involvement that may be required.

Issues with being a gifted child. Gifted children tend to perceive the world in unique ways and often results in feeling different from their peers and becoming isolated (Freeman & Jensen, 1999). Often, the child's parents may be tempted to crowd out the isolation with adult attention, but this is not necessarily helpful and may in some ways hinder the child's social development (Freeman & Jensen, 1999). In fact, according to Freeman and Jensen (1999), isolation can actually be advantageous to a degree, as it allows the gifted child "to focus as intently as they want (and must) to excel. So 'alone time' is not to be eliminated—just balanced" (para. 3). Gifted children are often perfectionists, a trait that has both positive and negative aspects. Perfectionism can motivate the child to master new skills or knowledge and find pleasure in his or her accomplishments. However, children who are perfectionists may also be unforgiving of

themselves and have a hard time going backwards and learning from failure, and ultimately, perfectionism can lead to pessimism (Freeman & Jensen, 1999, para. 6).

Sometimes, gifted children “resent their own giftedness,” concluding that being gifted is the very thing that prevents them from fitting in with their peers (Freeman & Jensen, 1999, para 4). “Being too smart” can be perceived as a problem, and “a large portion of American students with gifts and talents have developed social coping strategies that use up time, energy, limit their opportunities, cause bad decisions to be made, retard their learning, and threaten their lives” (Cross, 2002, para. 9).

Cross (2002) emphasized the importance of allowing gifted children to interact with their intellectual peers, even if there is an age difference. There is no point in allowing gifted students to become bored and frustrated in heterogeneous classes when these students have many opportunities to interact with a wider group of people through other activities such as sports and clubs (Cross, 2002). Similarly, gifted students should have the opportunity to pursue their passions, while also being gently encouraged to develop other interests. Cross (2002) went on to debunk the notion that “being gifted means never having to study or try hard in school” (para. 6). This belief can set up unrealistic expectations for students and make it difficult for them to deal with failure.

Discrimination of gifted children. Gifted programs in the U.S. seem to be suffering from a combination of budget shortfalls and unwillingness among those in general education to treat gifted education as a vital endeavor. Educators of gifted children are encouraged to cooperate with general education; however, the reverse is not always true. According to Kearney (1993), “Even the most profoundly gifted child is part of the ‘community of all children’ mentioned so often in the literature of school

reform” (para. 4). Schools’ prohibition of academic acceleration or continuous progress of students raises the question, “What messages are we giving all children about the value of academic achievement, and about intellectual diversity?” (Kearney, 1993, para. 5).

If the goal of education is to serve the academic needs of students, and not just teach the content outlined in the teacher’s edition of the textbook, it is imperative to find creative, practical ways to support all students (Kearney, 1993, p. 5). Racial or ethnic slurs or inhibiting the intellectual growth of a child with a disability is unacceptable however in some cases gifted children and their families face these issues even today (Kearney, 1993, p. 5). Education has a fundamental responsibility to teach these children as well. As Kearney (1993) wrote,

School is a place for learning. The message we give to all children about learning is linked in part to how we treat our most rapid learners. If they are ignored, exploited, damaged, held back in their progress, or teased, the message we give to all children is that academic learning doesn’t pay for anyone. (para. 7)

Jancich (2004) reinforced the premise that some gifted students are being shortchanged. In 2003–2004, the Southwestern Wisconsin School District chose to meet budget shortfalls by cutting services to its gifted students, and the gifted and talented teachers were reassigned as regular classroom teachers. Wisconsin is one of many states that require identifying academically gifted students; however, no state or federal funding for specialized programs is received to support gifted student development (Jancich, 2004). Larger districts may be able to continue their gifted programs, but smaller districts may be forced to eliminate the programs completely.

Jancich (2004) quoted Ruth Robinson, president of the Wisconsin Association for Talented and Gifted, as saying, “There is a false perception that gifted and talented students will be OK on their own” (para. 10). Gifted children from families with better economic means can send their children to various enrichment programs, but it is the ones from economically disadvantaged families who suffer the most (Robinson as cited in Jancich, 2004). Without a challenging curriculum, gifted students can also become bored, earn lower grades, and become inattentive in class, which may lead to a misdiagnosis of hyperactivity or attention deficit disorder.

Douglas (as cited in Jancich, 2004), stated that gifted students who are not challenged may be able to get through school without having to put forth a lot of effort and therefore do not learn good study skills or perseverance. All of these factors have the potential to cause problems for gifted students later on in high school or college. Underserved gifted students are at greater risk of dropping out of school (Jancich, 2004). Students are not the only ones who suffer because of cuts to gifted programs. According to Douglas, regular classroom teachers struggle to meet the needs of their gifted students when gifted programs or services are unavailable (as cited in Jancich, 2004, para. 17). Assistance from gifted teachers can be invaluable to regular classroom teachers in meeting the learning needs of the gifted.

Schools failing gifted children. Since the inception of No Child Left Behind, education policy makers in the U.S. have worried most about children at the bottom of the educational structure, even though gifted students drop out at the same rate as non-gifted students (Cloud, 2007). Other issues of concern are the identification of gifted children using only high achievement or high IQ scores and the one-size fits all mentality

of education traditionally held in this country (Feldhusen, 2001). While there is approximately the same number of school-age children at both the high and low ends of the educational spectrum, those at the higher end are expected to be able to succeed on their own. According to Winner (1996), “In the best case scenario, teachers recognize a student as gifted but, unable to teach at this level, they let the child learn independently” (para. 2). This attitude is evidenced in the funding allocated to different programs. More than \$8 billion is spent annually in the U.S. educating the mentally retarded, yet only about \$800 million is spent on gifted programs and in some states spending on the gifted is not even calculated (Cloud, 2007) despite evidence that those children with higher IQs (three standard deviations above the norm or IQs of 145 and higher) have just as many problems interacting with average children and learning at an average speed as do children with lower IQs (three standard deviations below the norm or IQs of 55 and below) (Cloud, 2007).

Cloud (2007) reported that although grade skipping usually works well for gifted children, many school systems are wary of the practice. Since the 1980s, gifted children are more often than not in age-assigned classes, although it is just as difficult for high-IQ students to learn at the pace of the average student as it would be for an average-IQ student to learn at the pace of a low-IQ student and another common assumption about gifted students is they will do fine because they are intelligent (Cloud, 2007). “There is abundant evidence that when we raise the standards in classrooms, achievement rises for all levels of students, not just the brightest” (Winner, 1996, para. 11).

One example of a successful gifted effort is the Davidson Academy in Reno, Nevada. The school is chartered by the state as a public tuition-free school.

Approximately 45 of the smartest children in the U.S. between the ages of 11 and 16 attend the school, and each is taking classes that are at least three years or more beyond their grade level (Cloud, 2007, para. 9). The Davidson school poses some very blunt questions about the education system in the U.S., such as, “Has the drive to ensure equity over excellence gone too far? If so, is the answer to segregate the brightest kids?” (Cloud, 2007, para 11).

The issue, Cloud wrote (2007), is that today marginal hardworking students are too often admitted to gifted programs and are assigned extra essays or field trips rather than accelerated course work aligned to the student’s ability. Winner (1996) wrote, “Enrichment classes are weak solutions to big problems. They offer only a few hours a week of possibly advanced instruction . . . they offer little continuity, they do not allow students to study something in depth” (para. 8). The most talented students should be kept within school systems by combining college-level dual enrollment, grade skipping, or other ingenious approaches in order to keep them in school and moving ahead at their own pace (Cloud, 2007).

Gifted Adults

Just as gifted children often have difficulty fitting in among average children, in school, gifted adults can have difficulty fitting into the larger world. Gifted adults may view themselves as crazy because they misconstrue the complexity of their thought processes. Or they may also see themselves as emotionally immature when they are actually just very emotionally intense (Gifted & Creative Services Australia, 2007). These adults may not understand why they feel so different or what is normal for them as gifted people, and so they often experience feelings that include frustration, anger, and

self-doubt, and they may even develop a false front to hide their giftedness and help them fit in (Gifted & Creative Services Australia, 2007).

Gifted adults may also have trouble choosing an appropriate career path. The problem often seems to be that gifted people are good at so many different things they have a hard time selecting one specialty to focus on and they become immobilized by the number of choices they face. In other cases, gifted adults may feel they are not quite good enough at any one thing, or they may fear that no one job will satisfy their need for learning and challenge. It is important that gifted adults, and the professionals who provide career guidance for them, recognize and accept the characteristics that are “normal for gifted”.

Gifted adults have a complex intellect and a burning desire for information. They have high levels of energy, intensity and sensitivity, set exceptionally high standards for themselves and others and are extremely hard on themselves and others. They are very independent and perceptive, like to be in control, are frequently driven, full of self-doubt and often feel they must be self-sufficient (Gifted & Creative Services Australia, 2007, para. 4).

Gifted adults also often have strong moral convictions, are sensitive and insightful, have an unusual sense of humor and a vivid imagination, are highly curious and love to read, question authority, enjoy a challenge, and have trouble switching off their thinking (Gifted & Creative Services Australia, 2007, para. 5).

Gifted adult underachievers. Underachievers are found in all segments of the population, and the gifted are no exception. Each individual is unique. Forehand (2005) wanted to explain underachieving by understanding rather than fixing the learner. She

noted that qualitative research involving case studies and interviews examining “the lived experiences, perceptions and expectations these individuals carry within their psyche” (as cited in Schultz, 2002, p. 203) seem to provide the most insight.

Forehand (2005) found identifying gifted underachievers difficult because many of them are very good at hiding their giftedness. According to Heacox (1991), “somewhere between 5% and 50% of the gifted have been identified as underachievers” (p. 2). Davis and Rimm (1998) stated that “society’s greatest loss and greatest potential resource” (p. 278) is underachievement of the gifted. Flint (2002) made a case for the importance of this topic. First, despite a half-century studying the cases of underachievement, it “remains a problem of major proportions” (p. 11). Second, “today as school systems and personnel are held accountable for students’ achievement, understanding underachievement and reversing it is crucial” (p. 16). Third, “even though federal law requires all students the right to free public education and assistance to reach their potential, many underachieving gifted students still exist” (p. 22). And lastly, Flint (2002) questioned whether the focus on testing rather than on learning could lead to underachievement being more prevalent (p. 1).

Forehand (2005) stated that “underachievement” is no easier to define than “gifted.” Reis and McCoach (2000) stated, “no universally agreed-upon definition of underachievement currently exists” (p. 152). For their purposes, they stated, “underachievement in gifted students involves a discrepancy between ability and achievement” (Reis & McCoach, 2000, p. 183). It seems to be the case that differences among gifted underachievers are as varied as differences among gifted high achievers. However, “there does seem to be some consensus about the factors that influence their

educational experiences” (Forehand, 2005, p. 5). Kanevsky and Keighly (2003) found gifted students sought five interdependent features: control, choice, challenge, complexity, and caring but instead what they received was teacher-directed textbook-based learning: content the students already knew. Flint (2002) argued,

students enter school wanting to learn, yet the system repeatedly offers boredom, and teachers offer them mundane work. At some point, for some individuals, it becomes a matter of honor to stand up for themselves and call attention to the boredom they are experiencing. (p. 225)

According to Forehand (2005), underachievement in the gifted falls into two broad categories: internal and external. Forehand also divided the major contributors to underachievement of the gifted into four categories: the “individual or personal” (individual causes), and “family or familia,” “society or societal,” and “school or educational” (external causes) (p. 6). Additional factors, including gender motivation and social immaturity, can be found internally and externally (Forehand, 2005). To add to the confusion, Ries and McCoach (2000) approached underachievement characteristics through character profiles. They decided there were “three types—the ‘anxious underachiever, the ‘rebellious underachiever,’ and the ‘complacent/coasting underachiever’” (p. 158). Although these reflect some associations, they also show how hard it is to define underachievers.

It is important to consider external factors that may affect underachievement in gifted students. The first factor is the family environment including conflict, dysfunction, and parenting styles which could be connected to underachievement. According to an analogy by Reis and McCoach (2000), “perhaps the family dysfunction is the result of,

rather than a cause of, the child's underachievement" (p. 160). The family environment's effect on achievement varies by individual. According to Alvino (1995), "Parents of gifted children are typically the single most important influence in their child's development, outlook and fulfillment of talent" (Abstract, para. 1). He also stated, "the home environment is critical in nurturing giftedness and instilling the values conducive to its full blossoming" (Abstract, para. 2).

The impact of underachievement on society is the second external factor affecting gifted children. Rimm (1986) defined the "ramifications of social change" with five categories of social change—family, education, competitive pressures, media, and moral standards. She hypothesized, "Each of the societal changes described have separate impact on each one of the key elements which caused the syndrome, and together the force is so great that it is unreasonable to expect schools alone to halt the epidemic" (p. 301). Schools cannot and should not be expected to be the answer to all of the social change issues affecting underachievement in gifted students today. A team approach between the school, the family and society as a whole is required.

Baker, Bridger, and Evans (1998) recognized that being smart is usually a plus in elementary school but understanding how peer pressure can influence students, especially in middle and high school must not be ignored. The authors stated, "although 'being smart' is generally an asset in elementary school, the developmental thrust toward peer conformity in middle and high school may cause gifted students to underachieve or to deflect attention away from their uniqueness" (p. 7). Reis and McCoach (2000) discussed how different cultures view achievement. "The construct of underachievement

in gifted students differs across cultures . . . the definition of achievement in a particular subculture may be very different from that of the dominant culture” (p. 162).

Life satisfaction among gifted adults. Studies have shown a positive relationship between spirituality and good mental health as well as more life satisfaction among spiritual people. It is also of interest to the study of life satisfaction of the gifted to explore this relationship. A sense of spiritual connection is more important in terms of happiness in life than is a religious affiliation (Cohen, 2002). Ortiz and Langer (2002) suggested mental health counselors include spirituality when caring for the whole person, and Tisdale (2005) took it further, saying counselors should become competent in spiritual issues to better address these issues during counseling. According to Jacobsen (1999), well-being and life development of gifted adults is an issue seldom addressed. According to Noble (2000), well-being in gifted adults can be influenced by spirituality. Chauvin (2000) stated that because of their curiosity and intellect, gifted individuals commonly “explore spiritual and existential issues from an early age” (p. 135). She also suggested that “an existential approach to counseling might be useful for gifted adults who may seek counseling to address issues such as the meaning of their lives, the existence of a higher power, freedom, responsibility, and the inevitability of death” (Chauvin, 2000, p. 135). Lee and Waters (2003) stated that life’s stressors can be dealt with much more easily if a strong feeling of spiritual well-being is part of one’s life. Gifted research has, for the most part, been focused on gifted students prior to high school graduation (Lewis, Kitano & Lynch, 1992).

Neihart (1999) addressed studies of the impact of giftedness on mental health and found that compared to the population as a whole, the gifted person’s ability to adjust was

average to above average. Tolan (1994) stated that perhaps some common traits associated with the gifted, such as perfectionism, which may lead to relationship issues or depression caused by great sense of empathy if a gifted individual dwells on the issues affecting the world.

World Math and Science Rankings

According to Glod (2007), 15-year-olds in 16 of 30 countries that belong to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a group representing the world's richest countries, had higher average scores in science than students in the U.S. on the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). The PISA tests, which measure the ability to apply math and science knowledge in real-life situations rather than just being able to recall facts, were given to 5,600 students in the U.S. and 400,000 students in 30 other countries worldwide. In 2009 the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) stated that the U.S. students' average score of 489 on a 1,000-point scale was actually 11 points below the average score of the 30 countries. The U.S. average scores were in line with those of eight other countries and above those of only five countries. Only four countries had average scores below the U.S. in the math portion, and 23 countries had average scores above the U.S. (NCES, 2009). The results seemed to verify that the U.S. is losing ground to other countries in these areas.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (NCES, 2007), given under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), assessed the mathematics and science knowledge and skills of fourth and eighth graders around the world (Kerachsky, 2008). The study aligns broadly with the math and science curricula in participating countries in order to measure

the degree to which students learn mathematics and science concepts and skills that are taught in those schools. In order to conduct or assess cross-national comparisons of educational context, TIMSS collects background information on schools, teachers, and students that may be related to the students' achievement. Instead of providing individual student scores, TIMSS provides national and group estimates of performance (Kerachsky, 2008).

The Institute of Education Sciences (NCES, 2007) reported that the 2007 average scores for the U.S. on the TIMSS were 529 for fourth graders and 508 for eighth graders (on a scale of 1,000), both higher than the TIMSS average. Fourth graders in the U.S. scored higher in math than students in 23 of the 35 other countries, lower than those in eight countries, and about the same as those in the remaining four countries. These average eighth-grade math scores were higher than those of students in 37 of the 47 countries, lower than those in five countries and not significantly different than those of the other five countries (NCES, 2007). While showing progress, the scores for the U.S. are not keeping up with the improvement of some other countries.

The scores for both fourth- and eighth-grade U.S. students were higher in 2007 than in 1995. Of the 16 countries that participated in the TIMSS fourth-grade testing in both 1995 and 2007, eight showed improvement in average scores, including the U.S. and three countries that scored higher than the U.S. in 1995. These three countries, however, showed larger gains than the U.S. At the eighth-grade level, 20 countries participated in the TIMSS in both 1995 and 2007, said about one third of those countries scored higher in 2007, including the U.S. and three others. Two of these countries had larger gains than the U.S. Despite efforts to improve science and math scores, the average science scores

for fourth and eighth graders in the U.S. were not measurably different between 1995 and 2007.

Lips and McNeill (2009) wrote that the National Science Foundation was to receive \$2.2 billion in additional federal funding as part of a \$787 billion economic stimulus (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009) that President Obama signed into law in February 2009. Included was new funding for science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education programs. Unfortunately, this type of federal initiative seems unlikely to be able to solve the fundamental problem of underachievement if the mistakes of the past 50 years are continued. America's national security and economic stability are at risk if nothing is done to ensure that the next generation of workers has adequate training and skills development in these critical areas. STEM-educated students are needed to help address problems and security of the energy and cyber infrastructure of the U.S. The most promising strategy for fixing the problems in STEM education is aggressive reform (Lips & McNeil, 2009). These reforms should include incentives for teacher excellence, new school models, etc., to promote STEM learning. State policymakers and private school administrators should support these reforms in STEM education. Tough economic times reinforce this fact, innovation and production of new technology to create new markets and add more jobs is absolutely necessary and that a STEM-educated workforce will help to regain some of the competitive edge (Lips & McNeil, 2009).

Lagging STEM education is not just an economic problem, it is a problem of national security. The concern seems to be that we will not have enough STEM replacements for the multitude of current workers who are approaching retirement. The

national laboratories and production facilities are at or near retirement age and there are not enough STEM trained students to fill the void. Also in 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama sponsored the Enhancing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Education Act, which would have reformed federal STEM education programs and encouraged new STEM initiatives at the state level, but the act was never enacted into law (Lips & McNeil, 2009).

If the U.S. wants to remain a global leader in scientific advancement and technology innovation, strengthening schools must be a priority (Lips & McNeil, 2009). For the past 50 years, many billions of dollars have been spent on federal programs trying to attack the STEM problem. The failure of most of the federal education programs could be a sign that the solution is not at the federal level. Policymakers at the state and local level must improve teacher quality in order to improve the performance of our students (Lips & McNeil, 2009). Perhaps challenging gifted children with an enriched curriculum taught by teachers educated in gifted education could be one of the U.S. strategies to address its lagging STEM education.

The St. Louis Public Schools Gifted Program in the 1950s

Discovering a possible relationship between a gifted education and the lived experiences of adults who participated in the gifted programs in their elementary and high school years requires close investigation of the individuals. This study focused on participants in the gifted program that began in the St. Louis Public Schools in the 1950s who were classmates of mine in that program. Contact with the gifted department of the St. Louis Public Schools proved unsuccessful due to lack of concrete information

regarding the program, but local newspaper articles from that time period did provide documentation on the program's history and details.

In the fall of 1955 (before passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958), the St. Louis Public Schools began a Major Learning Program in high schools to provide "special educational opportunities to gifted students" ("New Project to Begin," 1955, para. 1). According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* ("New Project to Begin," 1955), the screening process for this program required the student to "have one or more of the following qualifications: outstanding ability in a particular field, a record of unusual accomplishment, recommendation by faculty members, an intelligence quota 20 points or more higher than the class average" (para. 3). The high school students would take one extra course during the semester and be encouraged to concentrate on their area of expertise (para. 4).

Parents of eligible students were asked not to tell the child he is unusual and not to treat him as such, and [were] encouraged not to boast about the student. Further, the parents [were] urged to make plans for the child to go to college, if at all possible, or obtain technical training. ("New Project to Begin," 1955, para 7)

Because the program was designed not to speed up student progress but to enrich students' education, parents were asked not to request early graduation for their students. Counselors were also asked to advise students to take part in whatever extracurricular activities that would contribute the most to their development ("New Project to Begin," 1955, para. 8).

Superintendent of Instruction Phillip J. Hickey stated,

The program is designed to fill a long felt need . . . The school system has developed special education programs for children who deviate from normal physically or are below normal mentally. However, to all intents and purposes we heretofore had done virtually nothing special for the extremely able individual.

(“New Project to Begin,” 1955, para. 11)

In 1955 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reported (“Sixth Graders Are Eligible,” 1955) the St. Louis Public Schools announced a program for their exceptionally bright sixth-grade students would begin in 1956 (para. 1). The following two years the elementary school program was extended for the sixth graders to continue through seventh and eighth grade (para. 2). The initial program was to be held in nine schools throughout the city, with each of these schools drawing students from neighboring schools (para. 3). Unlike the high school program that emphasized guidance, the elementary school classes were designed to be separate from the other classes in the various schools (para. 4).

The *St. Louis Globe Democrat* (“Sixth Graders Are Eligible,” 1955) reported that, of the 332 sixth-grade students found eligible, 322 actually accepted the offer to join the new classes (para. 5). The sole requirement for eligibility was an IQ of 125 or more (para. 6). “We did not consider their previous record at all,” the assistant superintendent in charge of elementary education, Edward H. Beumer, explained, “on the assumption that it might not be so good because the work had not been challenging” (para. 7). He also stated, “Bright children from time to time chafe under conditions as they exist in our present setup. They tend to become problems sometimes” (“Sixth Graders Are Eligible,” 1955, para. 6-8).

Beumer also emphasized that students chosen for the special classes were taking

on a certain responsibility: “We are going to keep in the front of their minds the point that by virtue of their advanced abilities and better opportunities they owe a lot to their fellows who are not endowed so well” (“Sixth Graders Are Eligible,” 1955, para. 11). The students were expected to take part in normal school activities, mingle with other students normally, and only be differentiated in their own classrooms. This strategy was done in hopes of avoiding students being called names or being teased (“Sixth Graders Are Eligible,” 1955, para. 12).

The following February, 12 of the program’s sixth graders met with members of the St. Louis Public School Board of Education to demonstrate what they were learning (“Sixth-graders in New Program,” 1956). The students described scientific projects, handed out copies of a newspaper they had published, and ended with some conversational French. The teacher who introduced the students said that the “workshop projects” planned by the students helped them to learn leadership, cooperation, and research methods (“Sixth-graders in New Program,” 1956, para. 2).

In a 1956 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article (“Sixth-graders in New Program”) Mary Kimbrough reported that sixth graders in the gifted program “follow the same course of study as other students with no attempt to accelerate them into higher level programs. But their courses are enriched and broadened beyond the normal curriculum” (para. 5). The article reported that the “only addition to the course of study for the gifted students . . . is foreign language, being taught this year on an experimental basis as a pilot study” (para. 6). Harold C. Smith, Assistant Director of Education in charge of special schools, attributed the introduction of French to “the growing interest in other countries” and the need to provide an “enriched curriculum” (para. 18). Speaking of the gifted

program, Smith went on to say, “It’s not a matter of letting them skip grades, or of reaching out into the ninth grade level and teaching that subject matter to the sixth-graders just because they’re gifted youngsters” (para. 20).

It’s a matter of a broadened and especially stimulating course of study, which will help these youngsters make the most of their capabilities. If we merely held up the normal level as a standard for all, we would be training for mediocrity. (para. 21)

According to a 1962 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Wyant, 1962), the stereotype of the bookworm as uninterested in athletics and physically and socially inept could not be further from the truth (para. 1). That year, a total of 48 graduating seniors were

the product of a seven-year effort aimed to single out the most promising pupils for a program of study designed to bring out the best in them—for their own sake, and so that the community and nation could plead not guilty to wastage of talent. (para. 4)

The public high schools in St. Louis used a “tracking” program for all students. The students who were in this gifted program were in Track 1-A. Other students were in Tracks 1, 2 or 3. The students were asked to fill out a questionnaire (para. 6), and Wyant (1962) reported the following results:

1. “Forty-seven of the 48 graduates were going to college. Four of them were going to Ivy League colleges, one to the California Institute of Technology, and one to West Point” (para. 7);

2. “Thirteen of them planned to become teachers, and 12 planned to become engineers. Other career plans included journalism, law, advertising, and medicine” (para. 8);
3. “Most students in Track 1-A listed science as their favorite high school subject, followed by English, mathematics, social studies, law and government, fine arts, and physical education” (para. 9);
4. “The Track 1-A students had been ‘extraordinarily active’” beyond their schoolwork, including participation in student government and athletics” (para. 10);
5. “Forty-six had held regular jobs” (para. 11);
6. Nine out of 10 of the students said they did not have to work too hard in the gifted program. They said they did not have enough to do. A slight majority said they were handicapped by the gifted classification in elementary school, but a substantial majority said there was no such handicap in high school. (para. 12)
7. “The overwhelming majority, 43 of 46 who responded, thought Track 1-A students should rightly be more heavily laden than other students with scholastic chores. More than 30 said that persons of greater capacity had a correspondingly greater obligation” (para. 13).

Director of gifted classes and reading clinics Miss Kay L. Ware stated

This did my heart good, if you do not do this for them—transmit the concept that the individual’s gift is not to be used exclusively for his own aggrandizement—you have failed. And if these gifted young people coming out of schools are not going to help us, we are done. (Wyant, 1962, para. 13)

The article stated that the St. Louis results have unusual interest because much has been written about gifted children there is very little hard information about what happens when such children are singled out early as they are in St. Louis and given special attention through high school (Wyant, 1962, para. 17). This program that started in 1955 was pioneering. Ware stated, "We have made mistakes. There was no place to go to find out what should be done. Now we have visitors every week from school systems all over the country" (as cited in Wyant, 1962, para. 18).

In 1962, 1,743 of the 104,738 children in the St. Louis Public Schools were in the gifted program. By this time the children entered the program in fifth grade and the IQ requirement was raised to 130 or better (Wyant, 1962, para. 19). All fourth-grade students took the Thorndike group intelligence test, and those scoring 115 or higher automatically were administered the Binet Test. Those with a score of 130 in the Binet were eligible for the gifted class (Wyant, 1962, para. 21). Parents were required to give consent, which entailed having to transport their children to another school at their own expense. And some were dubious about a system that treated the gifted as a special group (Wyant, 1962, para. 22). Having said this, about 99% of the eligible students in 1962 chose to participate in the program (Wyant, 1962, para. 23).

When the program first started, accelerated class work was not a part of the curriculum. In 1962 the curriculum was speeded up and extended in depth. The enrichment included trips to the City Art Museum and other places (Wyant, 1962, para. 24). French classes were started in fifth grade and a special science and mathematics program in cooperation with Washington University was included. In high school these students took biology, chemistry, physics, and perhaps advanced physics (Wyant, 1962,

para. 25-26). The expectation was that by the time they got out of high school they would be a year ahead of other pupils and would have the equivalent of about one year of college work, which could allow them to earn their college degrees in three years rather than four (Wyant, 1962, para. 27-28).

Ware said that the brightest students needed constant challenge lest they “develop bad study habits, wool-gather, resist routine instruction, get lippy and generally hard to handle” (Wyant, 1962, para. 29). Busy work would not be effective for these students, Ware added, as “it makes them more disagreeable and sloppy than ever. But for a teacher who knows this, the sky’s the limit” (Wyant, 1962, para. 30). The St. Louis school system considered the program successful in identifying the best students and giving them a quality education. “This is the most precious thing we have to conserve and it’s high time we started conserving it” (Wyant, 1962, para. 38).

Reflection

“The purpose [of reflection and narrative analysis] is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Riesman, 1993, p. 2). Reflection on one’s lived experiences is a useful tool to induce recollections of buried memories and was a crucial element of this research. The effort needed to remember occurrences that happened 50 years and the process required to put these occurrences in some meaningful context forced all of us to dig deep into the recesses of our minds. Regarding reflection, Riesman (1993) argued, “The purpose is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (p. 2). As each interview was analyzed, individual views seemed to come out and began to form a distinctive pattern in

each participant's responses. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) stated, "from the analysis of the responses subjective interpretations can be made" (p. 4). Most importantly I found common threads, not necessarily exact agreement, from many of the subjects in the study on a variety of events and occurrences. Even though the subjects may not represent their lived experiences accurately "it is enough to note that they believe they are doing so. This belief is at the base of their struggles to tell their stories correctly" (Rosenwald, 1992, p. 271).

Another view on reflection refers to "the science of 'historical-hermeneutic' sciences or . . . the science of interpretation and explanation" (Habermas as cited in Mezirow, 1991, p. 5). As an interviewer, the process of interpreting the 50-year-old recollections of the participants was a great experience but sometime a difficult task because of my personal recollections of the same events. It was also hard to be objective during the interview process as well as during the transcription analysis because I had memories of many of the same events. This somewhat flies in the face of the historical-hermeneutic sciences view of reflection when Habermas stated during the process of analyzing the interview transcriptions "access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation" (Habermas, as cited in Mezirow, 1991, p. 5). I sought meaning from parts of the interviews but I also had personal gratification of reliving part of my own life and in some cases obtaining a better understanding of events in my life.

Through this process of interviewing and recollection, most of the subjects including myself had the opportunity to look back at events of 50 years ago and reflect on the affect those events had on our lives. The social and academic expectations and

pressures put on us, at times were difficult but we grew from those experiences. And as we looked back, it helped put our lives in perspective and gave many of us a chance to appreciate that time of our lives and its impact. “This involves an interest in self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of self-reflection, including interest in the way one sees oneself, one’s roles and social expectations” (Habermas as cited in Mezirow, 1991, p. 5).

Labeling Theory

Using the idea of “labeling theory” (Becker, 1963), Rist (1977) hypothesized If the labeling perspective can be shown to be a legitimate framework from which to analyze social processes influencing the educational experience and the contributions of such processes to success or failure in school, there would then be a viable interactionists’ perspective to counter both biological and determinists’ theories of educational outcomes. (p. 71)

Additionally, Rist (1977) said (of deviant behavior) “Further, if a label is applied to the individual, it is posited that this in fact causes the individual to become that which he is labeled as being” (p. 77). In 1973, Rubington and Weinberg stated that once a person is typed, he is cognoscente of the designation placed on him by others and acts accordingly when dealing with them and in doing so a social designation is affirmed and the person is socially changed. Applying this rational to being labeled gifted, or others labels, seems to makes sense. Another idea posited is that “one’s self-expectations influence one’s subsequent behavior” (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962, p. 179) which may be important to Rist’s (1977) argument, “An outcome of labeling might be the self-fulfilling prophesy” (p. 77).

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

As this work progressed and themes emerged, another possible effect of the program at the center of this research came to light. Almost all of the participants were very happy with their lives and felt that they have been blessed with good fortune. Merton (1948) first coined the idea of self-fulfilling prophecy; however, his thoughts revolved around false beliefs which would lead to self-fulfilling negative outcomes. The opposite seems to have been the case in this research. The expectations of success were evident in the minds of the participants of this program at the age of 10. In support of this idea, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) wondered if disadvantaged students would do better in class if the teachers expected more of them. The result of their work showed self-fulfilling prophecies could be established through the influence of positive beliefs. The same kind of reinforcement we were subjected to in the 1950s and 60s. However, this thought has an underlying assumption that if positive beliefs are beneficial, then negative beliefs must be detrimental, and that the effect of negative beliefs may even be greater than those of positive beliefs.

The notion that positive self-fulfilling prophecies can be more influential than negative self-fulfilling prophecies is supported by self enhancement theory which proposes that people are prone to view themselves favorably (Jussim, Yen, & Aiello, 1995). This research seems to also support the influence of positive self-fulfilling prophecies because the participants view themselves as content and happy with their lives.

In an effort to enhance their self-views, individuals may attend more to positive messages than negative messages during interactions with perceivers. Such a tendency

may cause targets to pay special attention to others' positive beliefs about them. If this is the case, then positive beliefs may create more powerful self-fulfilling prophecy effects than negative beliefs (Madon, Willard, Guyll, & Scherr, 2011, p. 589).

Summary

The Cold War gave us a sense of urgency to develop the minds of our brightest students and the enactment of the "National Defense Education Act" seemed to be the answer. But a review of literature illustrated the decline of the programs and a change in the approach to educating the gifted since the 1950s and 60s. Various programs for the gifted are used such as acceleration, pull-out programs, or ability grouping but there is no consensus or desire to have a national gifted program. Other issues including budget shortfalls, the reluctance to put a priority on gifted education, and questions about how to best identify the gifted. The No Child Left Behind Act has hindered the process with its emphasis on those students on the lower end of the spectrum.

Also addressed in the review of literature were some issues facing the gifted such as social awkwardness, feeling isolated from being too smart, and being a perfectionist. Gifted adults have the same issues as any other adult but they may also feel out of step with society. Their giftedness may cause them to struggle with career decisions because of their wide variety of interests. Underachievement is an issue with the gifted and is a great loss of potential to our society.

The literature revealed the overall satisfaction gifted adults feel about their lives. This life satisfaction may be due in some part to a sense of spirituality that seems to manifest itself in many gifted adults. This spirituality may also explain the likelihood of

these adults to be caring people with positive personal relationships and have an above average ability to cope with mental health issues.

Giftedness is being addressed worldwide with different approaches and with different results. Some countries view gifted programs as being essential to their national interest and embrace the need to cultivate their best and brightest. Many of these countries have very homogeneous societies, which may make it easier to identify their gifted students and therefore be able to develop national programs to meet the needs of the gifted. In contrast, the U.S. has a more difficult task to develop a national program for the gifted because of our very diverse population. This diversity, something that this nation touts, is a hindrance because it makes identifying gifted children more difficult. This situation along with the constant argument of lack of financial support for gifted programs may also be part of the decline of our international ranking in math and science over the last couple decades.

I also reviewed the literature on the gifted program, which is at the heart of this research. With the enactment of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 a great push was made to find bright students at all educational levels. The St. Louis Public School system was ahead of its time and had a gifted program in place in 1956. Although archival information is almost non-existent, enough information existed from newspaper articles of the time and a few references about the proactive stance of the public school system in St. Louis. This information provided an explanation of the school systems thought process in developing a program to meet the perceived needs of gifted students of that era as well as a process to identify gifted children.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Gifted programs have evolved and each has been unique in its design and success. Success is difficult to measure and often based on funding and the political climate. There seems to be a lack of research into student perceptions of the lifelong effects of being labeled. Understanding these perceptions of the lifelong effects of one unique gifted program from the past could inform designers of gifted programs of the future—investigating the perceived strengths to build on and the perceived weaknesses to address. The research questions required qualitative research methodology to answer them. The interview was designed to illicit responses from questions about their experience with a specific gifted program and their life thereafter. Schultz (2002) noted that qualitative research involving case studies and interviews examines “the lived experiences, perceptions and expectations these individuals carry within their psyche” (p. 203) and seems to provide the most insight.

The purpose of this research was to explore the current perceptions of a group of adults who were enrolled in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in the years 1959 and 1960 and graduated from the same high school in 1967. Thirty-three participants accepted the invitation to participate from a pool of 62. I designed a questionnaire to gather demographic information about the participants (e.g. educational background, career information) and interview questions to gather information on the participants’ reflections on the program and their lives thereafter. They were also asked about any long-term effects of the program and what affect the program had on relationships with other people then and for the rest of their lives. The gifted program in

this study was a complete pull-out or segregated program in elementary school and a tracking program in high school.

This study explored the following research question: How did the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program contribute to the lived experience of the adults who started the program in 1959 and 1960?

Methodology

A multiple case study method was determined to be the best fit for this study. The shared experience of being in the same childhood gifted program satisfied a criterion of the multiple case study method. The reflections of the participants of their shared experiences support the multiple case study method as does the confirmation of emerging themes that developed independently throughout the research (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004). Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, or by e-mail. The interviews were then transcribed. From the interview transcriptions, I wrote a story (case) about each interviewee as part of this multiple case study. A “case” is defined as an in-depth interview for the purpose of a study (Zach, 2002). The interview process consisted of 13 questions (Appendix A). Each interview lasted from one to two hours.

Data Analysis

The detailed analysis of interview data followed traditional methods of qualitative research. Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify patterns or emerging themes. The recollections of the subjects’ experience as part of the gifted program and the impact that it had on their lives as told through the case studies was many times predictive, sometimes surprising but always entertaining. As Zach (2005) acknowledged, case

studies offer a more vibrant understanding of context and gives the reader more of an experience than other more analytical forms of research.

Interviews were analyzed by searching for common aspects of their lives or of the gifted program that may suggest possible patterns or themes for further discussion. This type of analysis is referred to as “open coding.” According to Strauss (1987) “open coding is the initial, unrestricted coding of data.” (p. 28). Strauss (1987) also wrote, “[the goal of open coding] is to open up the inquiry. Every interpretation at this point is tentative . . . whatever is wrong in interpreting those lines and words will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry” (p. 29). Several themes emerged from analysis of the interviews.

Each interview was treated as a separate case study. The interviews were very candid responses to events, which occurred, in some instances, over 50 years ago. The face-to-face interviews were the most informative although difficult because of my participation in the same program and the experiences we shared. The shared experience between old friends seemed to add to the openness of the conversations, especially the lived experiences and life satisfaction. The reflective process was crucial to the study. It required them to speak about their lived experiences and the recollections of their participation in the gifted program. Part of the discussion was about the program itself. The views and attitudes of the participants about the gifted program seemed to emerge as themes.

Subjects

Participants were former students who were part of the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program. All participants started the program in the fifth grade in either September

1959 or January 1960 and participated in the program for part or all of their education from fifth grade through high school. I was a classmate and student in the gifted program and identified the subjects who met the criteria of this study from a publication listing the 1967 graduating class of Cleveland High School. There was no compensation for participants and there was minimal risk to the participating subjects.

This population is further defined by information gathered from a questionnaire completed by each participant (see Appendix B) prior to the interviews. Some of the information in Appendix B is as follows: of the 33 participants, 28 attended college right after high school. The level of education of the 33 participants included four who graduated from high school and two who obtained associate degrees. Eight of the participants completed either a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree and 15 hold either a Master of Arts or a Master of Science degree. Three of the participants hold terminal degrees; two in Medicine and one in English Literature (see Appendix G). Business/Management degrees were the most popular with participants obtaining nine degrees (highest degree) and education was second with eight degrees (highest degree). The level of education among the study participants' parents was explored. Among the mothers, one did not attend high school and one participant was not sure of their mother's level of education. Twenty of the mothers graduated from high school or obtained a GED and three did not complete high school. Of the seven mothers who attended college, four did not complete their degree, two completed a bachelor's degree and one obtained a master's degree (Appendix H).

The fathers' level of education was somewhat less than that of the mothers. Two of the participants were not sure of the level of education of their fathers, one father left

school after fifth grade and two others completed eighth grade. Twenty of the fathers attended high school but only 14 graduated. Of the seven fathers who attended college, four did not graduate, one obtained a bachelor's degree, one completed a master's degree, and one completed a law degree (Appendix I).

These figures are significant when put in the context of the times and the area where the students lived. The area was a predominantly blue collar part of St. Louis and many of the fathers were World War II or perhaps Korean War veterans. Many were also sons of union workers and followed in their dad's footsteps. Education was not a high priority or even a financial possibility for many who were not war veterans. Many of the mothers were stay at home moms who may not have valued education, although more of them completed high school than did the men. But, despite these statistics, the gifted children of these middle-class parents, most of whom never set foot in a college or university, went to college. Nearly 96% of the participants attended college and 82% completed college degrees.

Instrumentation

There were two instruments, an 18-question questionnaire that collected quantifiable information and a 13-question interview—both were designed by me and approved by Dr. Steve Sherblom and the Institutional Review Board of Lindenwood University. The questionnaires (Appendix B) were distributed to participants before the interviews through U.S. mail or by e-mail. Interviews are presented as individual case studies. Each interview consisted of the same 13 questions (Appendix A), which invited participants to share their experiences as students in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools and any perceived effects it had on their life experiences.

Procedure

Participants were identified, by the researcher and several of the participants, from the 1967 graduating class of a St. Louis Public high school that the gifted students attended. Once identified, locating the participants proved to be difficult. Using the internet, participants were found and they in turn provided information about others. As information was gathered about the 62 potential participants, the process of contacting all of them began. Telephone calls and e-mails were used to make initial contacts. Of the 62 identified, 33 accepted and the remaining 29 preferred not to participate, could not be located or had passed away. Participants were sent a letter (Appendix D) detailing the procedure, an informed consent form (Appendix C), and a questionnaire (Appendix B) to be returned to me before the interview. A time was set for the face-to-face interview (e-mail or phone interview if needed) at a location convenient for the interviewee, quiet, and free of interruptions.

I recorded the interviews using a portable recording device and had them transcribed by a colleague. Each face-to-face interview participant received a copy of his or her transcribed interview for reflection and verification giving them an opportunity to amend it. Participant anonymity and confidentiality was maintained by storing all voice recorded and transcribed interviews along with all questionnaires locked in a file cabinet located in the researcher's university office. Open coding was used to analyze the interview data and the questionnaire information was quantified on an Excel spreadsheet. After all the interviews were completed, my wife and I arranged two gatherings in St. Louis to reunite and to reacquaint us with the study participants. Over 20 attended, some attended both reunions, some only one and others were unable to attend at all. Although

this was an opportunity to gather information for my research, I chose not to do so. The opportunity to reunite and meet with old friends far exceeded my need for additional information, though I continued to learn from them informally through conversations. As the researcher I felt I should not include myself in this study and I am not included in the actual numbers reflected in this research but I felt compelled to add my story. As I conducted and analyzed the interviews of my former classmates I became very aware of the significance of that time in my life and realized, although much later in life than most, the positive affect it had on me. So after completing the all the interviews, analyzing the data, and writing the case studies I sat down and dictated my responses to the interview questions. I chose to dictate not write the responses to the questions in order to have a spontaneous flow of my thoughts.

Summary

The qualitative nature of this research and the personal recollections of the participants led to the use of a multiple case study approach in order to explore the richness and openness of the responses to the interview questions. The intention was to draw the reader into these lived experiences and to try to understand not only the effect of this program on the participants but to understand the context of the times. Using an open coding form of analysis allowed the reflective, candid responses of the participants were analyzed for common threads and emerging themes to make new meaning of their recollections. The unintentional bias of the researcher may have had an effect on some of the interviews. However, I became very aware of my potential to influence the interview process and worked very hard to avoid it by not drifting away from the interview questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Qualitative research results can be reported in different ways. Because the research methodology was a multiple case study, the interview results are reported as case studies. Though the participants' lives varied, their common experience was the gifted program. The following 33 case studies were written from responses to 13 questions asked of each participant (Appendix A). Only the first 12 of the questions were used for these summaries. The 13th question was "How would you rate your life on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most successful and why?" This question is answered in the form of a graph at the end of this chapter. The names of the participants are pseudonyms. The last summary is mine. I was a classmate and fellow participant in the gifted program described in this research. As a participant in the program, I was not an objective observer. Several of the early face-to-face interviews became long conversations between old friends instead of an interview. But the questions were answered, although with sometime non-objective, spontaneous interaction of the interviewer, honestly and openly by all respondents. Some of the interviews were by phone and some by e-mail (choice of respondents) and are reflected in the brevity of a few summaries. The summaries are in no particular order.

Summaries of St. Louis Public School Gifted Program Participants Interviews

During the interview process seven themes became evident and may be helpful in reading the case studies. The first emerging theme was *expectations*—expectations of parents, teachers and the country. *Social issues* were also somewhat problematic. Because of the gifted-only classrooms, the students were rather isolated from the other

students in grade school and may have been handicapped socially by that segregation. The “gifted” *label* was embraced by some and downplayed by others, but affected all of the students. Faith and *spirituality* has also become a large part of the lives of many of the gifted adults in this study, and another theme to contemplate. *Impact* was another theme—the impact of the program was different for each of the participants as was the timing of that realization. The *lack of good high school advising* was, unfortunately, prevalent among the students. And finally, despite pressure and the issues students in this program faced, the end result is the feeling among the participants of being happy and *content with their lives*.

Paul. Students in the gifted program are sometimes surprised to be in a unique situation. For Paul, being placed in the gifted program surprised him because he was a poor student for a long time. Paul had poor vision that was diagnosed in the third grade. He had developed bad homework habits that limited his abilities as a student. Many students resented Paul after he was placed in the gifted program because he was notorious for putting minimal effort in his studies. “Those who knew of my lack of academic success were resentful that someone who showed such little academic effort was rewarded in this manner.” Although other students resented him, his family was very proud he was given the opportunity to participate in the gifted program. His mother bragged about his accomplishment in the gifted program, and his father rewarded Paul’s successes. Paul experienced the discomfort of being placed with students who were very intelligent and gifted and it made him feel like a “phony.” He thought that once he entered the gifted program, opportunities would be handed to him instead of having to do the hard work himself. “I thought things were just supposed to happen, without too much

effort on my part.” Paul faced the daily challenge of taking several different city (public) bus routes to get to his new school. Although there were some difficulties, Paul also experienced many advantages in the gifted program. He loved the teachers in the program because they were very patient with him, but firm enough to motivate him to complete his assignments. Before this opportunity, Paul found it easy to be lazy in school because of the lack of challenges in the previous grades. He felt the program offered him a new start. “Personally, a fresh start. We were exposed to many things we would not have had in our previous schools. Plus, being with other kids with similar interests was good.” Paul did not like being separated from his old friends because he went to a different school and hung around different children on a regular basis.

When Paul started high school he dropped out of the gifted program. “After a poor performance in eighth grade, I was pretty much urged to take the regular slate of classes in high school. As I was just a so-so student in high school, it was probably a good move.” He did maintain friendships with the gifted students in high school, rather than his old friends. He also made new friendships with students from other gifted programs.

After teaching for 32 years, Paul has some strong feelings about tracking programs.

My opinion is tempered, again, by 32 years in the classroom. I have seen, at least in my school, more money spent, more resources offered, more time, paperwork, and meetings spent on the lower half of the spectrum than the top. Granted, SPED [special education] programs are necessary, but we don't pay near enough attention to the kids who will be the leaders someday.

Paul sees his life with both high and low points. He has been voted “Teacher of the Year” and “Coach of the Year” several times and has helped many students move on to prestigious schools and progress on to successful careers and lives. Paul attributes many of his successes to lessons learned in the gifted program. He mentioned his divorce after 31 years as a low point in his life. The gifted program enabled Paul to establish a foundation for his life, so that he could achieve success instead of spiraling down the wrong path. Paul is aware of his failings in high school but he appreciates everything the gifted program offered him as a student in his younger years.

Jeanie. Jeanie was tested as gifted and put into the 1959 public school gifted program. Being labeled gifted kept Jeanie humble. She did not feel this label made her more intelligent than other students. Jeanie feels that she was given more opportunities than students who were not labeled gifted. “I never was sure that it meant I was smarter than others but it did mean that I had tested better than others and that as a result, I was given opportunities others were not given.” She always felt that being gifted had a negative effect on her brother and caused him to drop out of high school in an attempt to “act out.” “My brother, however, ended up dropping out of high school. Perhaps he was ‘acting out,’ determined to ‘go the other way’ from his big sister. But who knows?” There was no certainty on why her little brother did this, but she does believe her label caused friction between the two of them. They never became close. On the other hand, Jeanie had a very strong relationship with her parents that consisted of a mutual and unconditional love.

Jeanie did not remember any particular difficulties being labeled gifted “other than a lack of sleep from being given so much homework.” She had a great experience in

grade school with teachers, students, and the challenges it brought. The format of the program met Jeanie's needs. Jeanie's teachers had an impact on her. "The teachers were very good. They set high standards for us. But they were fair, caring, and encouraging. I continue to remember some of them more than what they taught me." Even today she still remembers their teaching methods and philosophies. They set high standards for their students and encouraged them to excel.

Everyday Jeanie would ride the city bus to school. It did not have a huge impact on her family because she attended a different school. She was upset to change schools and missed her old friends but made new friends on the bus and at her new school. "I remember being sad about leaving my friends at the old school, but I soon made new friends and enjoyed riding the bus with them." Jeanie felt there were four advantages being in the gifted program. First, it conveyed the message that she was special. Second, it improved her self-confidence and positive self-esteem. Next, it gave her a solid foundation for learning. Finally, it exposed her to a university setting while still in grade school. Jeanie had fun and could not think of any disadvantages to the gifted program. When reaching high school, Jeanie no longer considered herself being in the gifted program. She perceived it as if she was just taking different classes than other students. "I really don't remember my high school time as being spent in the gifted program. I just took certain classes that others didn't."

Jeanie is not in favor of the tracking program in the public school for three reasons. First, the kids that are involved in tracking programs develop differently, on different timetables. Second, once a child is labeled, they are stuck in that program. Third, she believes kids do not receive an equal education with a tracking program.

Jeanie thinks we should teach our kids to know and appreciate that every student possesses “gifts,” not that one child is more “gifted” than another. “How wonderful it would be if the gifted program I was part of in elementary school was simply the program for all students. Instead of making special, challenging classes in elementary school for so-called gifted students, but have special, challenging classes for all students. And let's teach our kids to know and appreciate that every student possesses gifts.”

The life-long effect of the gifted program for Jeanie was the love for learning, having the desire to achieve, and confidence. Jeanie has lived a very successful life, having accomplished many goals in life. She graduated from Yale University, became a pastor, and married a doctor. She has lived a life filled with love for her relationships not only with her family and friends but also with God.

Jerry. Jerry was an individual who experienced some of the more negative aspects of being labeled gifted. He felt he was set apart from others. He had to leave his friends to attend a new school that was further away. “Both of my parents worked, so I had to take a public bus to and from school each day versus walking a block to my original school.” People set higher expectations for him. “Everyone expected more from me, not just scholastically, but they expected me to be mature for my age.” Attending a different school caused difficulties in his old friendships in his neighborhood. Jerry did notice the advantages of accelerated learning and being challenged. However, he felt the full time segregation that the program created was a serious disadvantage. He felt that once school is over, gifted students have to live in the real world. “Not sure full time segregation is the best answer. Sooner or later, regardless of whether or not one is deemed gifted, we have to learn how to blend with the rest of society.” Allowing that in

school with even a few classes would have been beneficial. Jerry felt high school was better since it was a blended program and he attended a school in his own neighborhood. “This was a better experience for me because I could attend the same high school as others in my neighborhood. And there were more opportunities to blend with the student population at large.” Despite his dissatisfaction with many aspects of the program, Jerry does credit the program with instilling him with a desire to learn. “As I look back, I think it instilled in me the desire to learn; not just learn ‘enough’ to get a certain grade.”

Jerry has a master’s degree in business and his two children both have master’s degrees as well. Neither of his children was in the gifted programs. Jerry completed his college degree entirely in the evening as he entered the Air Force a year after high school. Overall, Jerry is highly satisfied with his life, both professionally and personally. He feels happy and successful.

Marty. Schools create gifted programs for those students who have the mental ability for advanced work. This program set those students apart starting in the fifth grade. Marty was given the opportunity to be in the gifted program. “We were given more opportunities earlier for studies in areas not usually afforded to students of the same age.” Besides the educational opportunities afforded the students, they were also put in a classroom with other gifted students for the same learning capacity which made it easier to also bond with them socially. “Other students, those also in the program created a special bond because many of us were together from fifth grade onto graduation from high school and some of us even went to the same university as undergraduates.” In the regular classrooms, these students may not have felt as comfortable bonding with the other students. Marty also found it difficult to maintain relationships with students from

his former school. Because of the elite opportunities offered to the gifted students, the program did inevitably cause some segregation between gifted and non-gifted students. Marty describes his experience in the gifted program in elementary school as an amazing opportunity. “It was great to learn French at an early age. The seed sown then would make that language and its literature a lifelong friend, the area of my eventual doctoral work, the discipline of my work as an educator, and an incredibly useful tool in my military career.” Being set apart was an advantage of the program, allowing students to be challenged, encouraged to apply themselves, and to grow to their full potential. In high school, Marty became lazy and his parents found this to be a challenge despite having great pride in their son.

And for my parents, it was a source of both pride and challenge. I was notoriously lazy in subjects that didn't interest me and totally energetic and everything in ones I enjoyed. I also hated some, largely math, until I had a great awakening in my sophomore year of high school.

Marty believes he owes much of his professional career to the gifted program. Due to the challenging curriculum throughout the gifted program, Marty was better prepared for college because he worked harder and concentrated on his studies.

Marty rated his lifetime success as 10 out of 10. “I cannot imagine being happier or more satisfied.” Marty realizes the gifted program was an amazing steppingstone to his future success throughout high school, college, graduate school, and in a 24 year military career retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. Today, “I have been a full-time professor at the Air Force Academy for over 18 years, after having served 15 years as a military faculty member before retiring.” When Marty began his journey as an

elementary school student in the gifted program, he was unaware of the life-altering path he was about to embark on. However, as his life progressed, Marty remembers habits instilled in him through the program. Without being in the gifted program, Marty may have missed out on many of the opportunities that challenged him to always strive for the best. Joining the gifted program was one of the greatest opportunities and decisions of his life.

Kevin. Some students were not comfortable being placed in the gifted program. “It was a label that I really did not like. As a fifth grader I did not want to be separated from my friends that I had been attending school with.” His parents were pleased that he was invited into the program. There were times some of the other students made negative comments about the gifted students that made Kevin feel uncomfortable. “I was rather immature and did not fully apply myself and therefore did not realize all the benefits from the gifted program.” He disliked the small classes, but enjoyed the many educational opportunities available to him. Although Kevin did not take total advantage of the format of the program, it did meet his needs by offering more diverse classes. The experienced teachers, who were more than qualified, enabled Kevin to learn much in a minimal amount of time. Although he attended the same school, Kevin felt segregated from his previous friends and remained somewhat immature throughout elementary school. “I did not go to another school as I stated above, I did not like being segregated from my friends I had been attending school with.”

In high school, Kevin felt he had not grown out of his immaturity. But it was different from elementary school because he was able to attend classes with non-gifted students. “High school was different . . . I was able to attend classes with non-gifted

students. The idea of attending classes with different tracked students made for a more enjoyable learning experience.” Kevin believed that tracking systems are beneficial. “The tracking program makes sense in that it offers different ranges of educational opportunities to students with varied interests and different intellectual abilities.” He believes the gifted program did not entirely play a part in his success in life but appreciates all that the program offered him at such a young age. “I may have realized some benefit from the program and that it gave me a solid academic foundation, even though I did not take full advantage of the gifted program.”

Chris. The gifted label had mixed connotations for Chris, depending on the group of friends he was with. He was always considered an athlete, so things changed when he was labeled as gifted. He enjoyed playing sports including baseball, softball, and basketball with his close friends. When he was accepted into the gifted program, Chris was thrilled and proud of his abilities, but was embarrassed to tell his athlete friends. Being gifted forced Chris to change to another elementary school. Although Chris's transition to his new school went smoothly, he still did not enjoy being moved around. At the new school, academics were more important to the students than sports, so Chris decided to modify his personality. “When I was with my [new school] friends I tried to act smart and when I was with my [old school] friends I tried to downplay that aspect of my personality.”

He said his family members reacted differently to his acceptance into the gifted program. He had three younger siblings, a brother (13 months younger), a sister (four years younger), and a sister (13 years younger). Both Chris and his younger sister were in the gifted program, but his other siblings were not. Chris and his brother became

competitive in intellectual games and trivia facts. He believes they grew into this competitive relationship because of the closeness in age. Chris's brother was not in the gifted program, and this caused resentment.

[My youngest sister] was also part of the gifted program however [my brother and other sister] were not. I do not have a problem with [them] not being in the gifted program but with a brother that is 13 months younger and a class behind you and has to follow in his big brother's footsteps, there could have been just more than the gifted influence.

This tension still exists. The two sisters had no problems with Chris. However, they were always aware of the competition between their brothers. Chris's parents were very proud of his success in school and they never placed too much pressure on him or set high expectations. His parents have always supported his career decisions as well. His parents never attended college. When their oldest son received his master's degree they were thrilled. Chris's paternal relatives were very proud of their nephew for being in the gifted program. But, his mother's relatives became resentful. His mother's sister had a son a year older than Chris. Because her son was not in the gifted program, she appeared bitter.

Fitting in was sometimes hard for gifted students. Chris's struggle with this began when he transferred to the new school. His problems began in fifth grade when he did not quite understand a lesson in class. He approached his teacher for assistance with the unfamiliar material but she did not fulfill his needs. Because he felt a lack of support from the gifted program teachers, he begged his mother to return him to his old school.

When his request was denied, Chris refused to do homework and made himself sick to avoid going to school, hoping he would flunk out.

I went home and told my mom that I wanted to go back to [the old school] because I hated the program. I found out later that my mom went to [the new school] several times and was in the office with the principal crying her eyes out, “He sits up in his room and doesn't do his homework so he can flunk out and go back to [the old school].”

Chris endured these uncomfortable feelings at school until he reached the seventh grade. At that time, he began to understand assignments and finally fit in with his fellow students. He was still struggling with many subjects, but his athletic abilities helped him gain friends.

After working through this turmoil, Chris enjoyed his time in the gifted program. His mother always attempted to help Chris form friendships at the new school by being involved with the school. Money was always an issue at home but whenever the students at the new school were doing an activity that cost money, his mom found a way for him to participate. “My father worked two jobs and we didn't have a lot of money. But, if my friends at the new school wanted to do something which would put a financial strain on us my mom always made sure that I was included.” Another method Chris's mom used to help him through those uncomfortable times was becoming a room mother when he was in fifth grade. Chris felt the gifted students were treated with more respect and were expected to be more mature. Chris is grateful for experiencing activities including the Art Museum and the symphony which others were not eligible to attend. As Chris advanced in the gifted program, he found it was not formatted to maximize his needs. He

was labeled gifted in school so he was in advanced classes in every subject. When his younger sister went through the gifted program 13 years later, she was labeled gifted in only science and math. She participated in advanced classes in those subjects, but attended regular classes for her other subjects. Chris said, “I think that I may have been gifted in some areas but not all. To be pushed in and told ‘You are going to be smart in everything’ was not for me and a lot of the kids were like that, not gifted in every area.” He feels he and many of his gifted classmates would have been more successful in the type of system his sister was in.

By being in the gifted program, Chris experienced activities not available to him at his old school. At the new school, he received more one-on-one education because the class sizes were small. He also felt the specialized teachers for some subjects were an advantage to the gifted program.

The gifted program in high school was hard for Chris. Between sports, school, and hormones, Chris failed to balance his priorities. His father dropped out of high school during his sophomore year, and did not provide much positive advice to his struggling son. Instead, his father shared some hard luck life experiences that inspired Chris. Chris's mother did complete high school. Her goal, after high school, was to find a job and start a family. Chris found out most of his information about high school from his friends and other relatives. Chris was not at the top of his class so he felt it was very important to excel in sports during high school. He never talked to his friends about being an academically advanced student in high school, “not because he was embarrassed by it, it was just not a big deal.”

Chris believed being involved in the gifted program was more positive than negative. He is more comfortable discussing his participation in the gifted program now than during his childhood. Chris is now a high school teacher and coach. When he tells students he was in the gifted program, they are amused, look at him and say “Coach?”

Chris attended Southeast Missouri State University earning a bachelor's degree in education and obtained his master's degree from Maryville University. Both of his children also attended college. Chris is very pleased with his life. Being a huge sports fan, he remains active and plays on three different volleyball teams. He does not worry about making a lot of money or trying to buy the newest things. Chris enjoys every bit of his life!

Ron. Ron started in the gifted program in 1959. He enjoyed the opportunities he was involved in while in the program. His favorite and most rewarding experiences being a gifted student were the art field trips. Ron credits influences from the gifted program instructors on the positive outcomes of his life. Fortunately, the gifted program was convenient for him. It was set up in the school he attended. The gifted program was difficult for elementary students to explain to others, but Ron believed it was a positive label for him. Ron and his parents were proud of the good grades he received. Sometimes his parents seemed to be too proud of him, setting the bar beyond Ron's abilities. “Of course, it was a situation that gave my parents some grading material and often expressed that I should always get all A grades since I was so smart. That may have been a problem with expectations higher than my abilities.” Ron did not let these unreachable expectations lower his self-esteem. After finishing elementary school, Ron went to high school where he continued in the gifted program. He believed his high

school's gifted experience was as fantastic as his elementary school experience. "I thought it was terrific, having the opportunity to participate in so many of the extra programs that aren't offered today." Although Ron had such an incredible time in the gifted program, he believed children today would not benefit from it as much as his generation. He believed that the amount of peer pressure placed on children now would make the experience less noteworthy. Overall, Ron was very pleased with the elementary school's gifted program. "What stands out most in my mind are the field trips concerning the arts. I think we were blessed to have the opportunity to learn [from] such a wide variety of experiences." His teachers and the opportunities the program provided influenced his career choices and lifestyle.

Ron is a graduate of Southeast Missouri State University with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Ron had a wonderful time being involved in the gifted program and felt that his parents were very proud of him. Neither of Ron's parents attended college but they both graduated from high school. Ron has a son and a daughter. His son graduated from high school and his daughter has a bachelor's degree and went to graduate school. Neither of his children was involved in their school's gifted programs. Ron did not maintain any long-lasting relationships with the students he was involved with in the gifted program. Ron did feel the program had some lifelong effects on him.

My first job career as a television news reporter, anchor and producer was greatly influenced by the teachers and the classes. My second career as an advocate and speaker for people in recovery from addiction has also been influenced by my early teachings by being comfortable in front of a class or group of people.

Diane. Being labeled gifted means something different to each person who is identified. In the case of Diane it was, for the most part, a positive experience. “I liked it; it meant I got to go to school with smart kids.” Diane truly enjoyed learning, and enjoyed the special projects and perhaps, most of all, enjoyed being surrounded by other students like her. She did face some challenges with the label, primarily from her parents. Her mother was concerned having a gifted child. Neither parent fully supported the program or offered the needed emotional support. But her biggest challenge and only real complaint against the gifted program was a lack of emotional support. “It would have been nice to have a counselor help me understand what I could do with being gifted.” Since her parents were not providing it, she thought perhaps the school would offer this service. She had to change schools and then deal with parents who encouraged her not to be “too smart”. Diane felt she needed a counselor to help her through the transition. As a child she found it hard to understand why she was not “normal” like the other children and why she was singled out. At 10-years-old, Diane did not comprehend the reason she was pulled out from her classroom and separated from her friends. She felt she was somehow different than her friends and really did not know why. Despite this, the positive aspects of gifted education made up for the negative ones. Diane was kept involved, constantly challenged, and interested in school.

Diane felt that the gifted program was an advantage. She did feel that had her parents supported her and not held her back, perhaps she would have stayed the course with her academics and obtained a Ph.D. However, when asked how she feels about her life, she is very happy. She felt the lifelong effects of the gifted program such as building self-confidence, instilling a feeling of competence and finding a career she loves were

great. "I like the work I do, I feel confident and competent." Looking back, she has no regrets. Today, she has daughters who are also gifted. She has encouraged them to embrace their gifts. As she looked back on being labeled gifted, she acknowledges that the times were different than today. Today she feels it was a great advantage to have an IQ in the gifted range. However, she is a strong believer in Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory and feels that being gifted is only part of the successes she has achieved in her life. The gifted program gave her a good academic foundation but it also gave her a desire to be successful in everything she attempts. She measures her success not only in business but in her personal life as well.

Carla. Being in a gifted program for some students gave them more self-confidence and also the feeling that more was expected of them. Carla, the third member of her family to be involved in the program, felt pressure at times in the program but enjoyed pleasing her family when she did well. "I felt that I was under a lot of pressure, most of which I placed on myself. And, I cannot say that I would not have felt the same way had I stayed in the other class, it may simply have been a part of adolescence for me." With the pressure of the program, Carla felt fortunate that she did not have to change schools when she entered the program. "I think that a pull-out format is really the only way for an advanced program to be successful." Carla discussed how different gifted programs are today and how they have evolved. Today, her own gifted children were not taken out of their regular schools and were not ridiculed by other students for being gifted as Carla was when she was younger. But, with teachers who were very devoted to their professions, the gifted program challenged Carla and gave her more opportunities to learn through many experiences. "With a tracking system, high school

was not that different from elementary school.” Carla did enjoy the fact that she was occasionally able to have a class with children in the lower tracking level, but she felt the pace in those classes was far too slow. “We owe it to promising students to give them the chance to go as far as they can.” Carla believes that children with advanced gifts should be able to strive to achieve their personal best but students today have to go slower and wait for the other students. “We, as a country, have continually ‘dumbed down’ every aspect of life and should consider raising the bar.”

Overall, the gifted program gave Carla the ability to think for herself. The program provided Carla with the attitude to never stop researching a problem until she achieved the answer. “We were not simply taught facts; we were inspired to find out why these facts were true. We were encouraged to be curious and to embrace knowledge.” The gifted program gave Carla the ability to achieve a life of fulfillment and contentment as a mother and wife. She was fortunate to be a stay-at-home mother, who made her children very happy and she's been able to work out of her own home. The gifted program appears to have provided Carla with a life of happiness and a lot of pride in the activities she has chosen to be involved in.

Dana. Being enrolled in the gifted program at a school out of her neighborhood negatively affected most aspects of Dana's life. “I had some negative connotations especially from friends from the old school incident teasing, being called the ‘brain.’ Dana's father had joined the military after high school. When he returned, Dana's mother dropped out of high school after 10th grade, they were married and started a family. When Dana was in third grade her family moved to the city (St. Louis) after her dad lost his job in the mines. During the fourth grade, she was tested for the gifted program and

in fifth grade Dana started in the program. Dana had always been an outgoing and friendly child, until the third grade when many significant changes began to happen and disrupted her life. She became quiet and introverted and was not as social with her new classmates.

She was required to attend the new school with the other gifted students. Because she was going to a school that was out of her neighborhood, she had to find alternative ways to get to school. A mother of one of the three students being transferred to the new school offered to drive the gifted children to the school bus stop every day, which helped. Riding the bus was a concern for Dana's parents because she was so young. But they allowed it. Dana had a lot of homework from the gifted program that kept her away from her family and friends in her old neighborhood. She spent most evenings and weekends working on schoolwork instead of socializing with the neighborhood children. Because Dana attended a different school than the other children in her neighborhood, they also distanced themselves from her. The relationship between her and her older brother was strained “because my brother always had problems in school and so the comparison with my grades, his grades, and expectations of my parents was always a problem.” All of these factors seem to cause Dana to become even more introverted.

Dana always felt out of place while she was in the gifted program. She felt as though she had barely passed the required test to be accepted in the program placing her on the low end of the gifted students. “I wanted to return to my old school after one year, my parents checked in on it and all the information they got from the principals and teachers from both sides was that they did not want me to return to the old school.” Dana describes her instructors in the gifted program as strict and stiff. Students who did not

keep up as well were intimidated by the teachers. She felt as though the teachers were motivating the students by fear, scaring them into pushing harder to learn. She did not feel that they demonstrated the fun in learning. Dana always felt stressed and pressured to succeed, feelings that children that young should not be experiencing. "I was not sure what my needs were at that point. I felt as though I was struggling and pressured and I don't think a child at that age should feel that way."

Despite the negative aspects of the gifted program, she did experience some positive ones. She felt the instructors, though tough, were the best of the best. The teacher that taught art was from the St. Louis Art Museum and her two French instructors were born and raised in France. The students went on field trips that would never be offered to other children in the public schools. "I love art. I love the Art Museum . . . those sorts of things I believe were my little jewels from that program, cultural closure." The exposure to culture was a great benefit for all the students in the program.

Dana did not go on to college after high school. Instead she got married, settled down, and started a family. Counselors at her high school never explained the different options she had after graduating from high school. Had Dana received more counseling, she thinks she might have taken a different route.

I figured counselors sat down with me and said "what are you going to do after school?" The counseling may have made a difference, not that I would have said I would have taken a few college classes, because I was going to get married and have children, that's what I planned to do."

She also said, "I'm not saying that is the path that I would have taken anyway but if I'd known about it maybe something could have been done. I could've had children and

go back to school but that did not happen.” Dana has two children, a son and a daughter. Her son received an associate's degree in law enforcement after high school. Her daughter did not finish high school and neither child was in the gifted program's other schools.

Dana believes she would have grown up a different person if she had not been involved in the gifted program as a child. Although she experienced some pretty incredible things, it really hampered her social skills. “I think probably for anybody else it might've been a good experience. For me I might have been a different person if I had been left at my community school.” Because of some of the teasing she feels “it affected me, becoming a person who wants to please people rather than just being who you are.” In the last few years Dana has found herself and her passion. She uses her experience with the gifted program to help others. At the age of 52 Dana finally enrolled in college. She earned an associate degree in elementary education from Jefferson Community College and works for Head Start. Although now divorced, Dana is happy, enjoys the simple things in life and treasures every minute of it.

Patrick. Patrick was tested and given the opportunity to participate in the gifted program. He was too young to understand the meaning and requirements of a gifted student, but nonetheless, Patrick and his parents happily accepted it. “I did not understand the word but my feelings were entangled in the meaning of potential.” After being accepted into the gifted program, issues developed among his friends. The students who were not in the gifted program grew to resent Patrick because of the opportunities afforded him. Patrick felt he had not changed and did not understand the changes that occurred between him and his former grade school friends. Patrick and the other gifted

students had the opportunity to listen and learn about classical music, gain an understanding of art and architecture, advance their math and science skills, go on enlightening field trips, and learn how to design and construct an ice boat. His most enjoyable times in the program were when he connected with his teachers. The years that Patrick did not care for the teacher, he felt he did not get as much out of the program. Through excellent opportunities and helpful teachers, Patrick not only learned material that would aid him intellectually, he learned lifelong skills, such as the value of practice and teamwork.

The gifted program did not affect Patrick's home life significantly. He had four younger siblings: a brother and three sisters, one of which had Down Syndrome. Each of his siblings were also labeled as gifted students, except for his sister with Down Syndrome. The relationships he had with his brother and sisters were not affected by each of their intelligence levels but rather by the age differences. "My relationship with my siblings was tempered more by age discrepancy than by intelligence difference." Patrick's father was not very involved with his schooling, except by setting expectations. But, Patrick's mother was very active. She always attended PTA meetings and participated as a room mother. Both parents were very proud that Patrick excelled in school. Overall, the gifted program gave Patrick a confidence boost. He learned that he was a leader and became a quick learner.

In Patrick's eyes, the gifted program had its advantages and disadvantages. In addition to the many activities of Patrick's gifted class, he also benefitted from smaller classes, separation from the other students, and caring parents. Because the gifted students are pulled out of the normal classroom and grouped together, their student to

teacher ratio decreased. This provided students more one-on-one interaction with their teacher. The separation between gifted students and average students kept everyone on the same page within the classroom but on the playground or in the neighborhood things were different. Bullying due to differences occurred all the time. It created threats and physical altercations. "I spent less time with guys with whom I had been friends prior to fifth grade and I did not understand it. I do not think that it was me who saw the difference." Being pulled out of the mainstream classroom had a few negative affects according to Patrick. He did not get the chance to become familiar with having regular homework assignments, students with disabilities, or differences among people.

The excellent opportunities and challenges continued as Patrick entered high school. Patrick met other gifted students that had similar experiences in grade school. Patrick developed close relationships through other activities: such as basketball, softball, baseball, football, track, drawing, painting, and music. "The new students had similar experiences and they were really interesting and fun, although my expanded friendships were predicated more by athletics and not the classroom." He learned more from the teachers he could engage verses the teachers whom he could not create this bond.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Southeast Missouri State and two master's degrees, one from Memphis State University and the other from University of Memphis, he is pleased with the way his life has developed. He is appreciative for the opportunities of being involved in the gifted program throughout his education. It prepared him for higher education and the road beyond. "Essentially, I got a confidence boost already begun by my mother. She affirmed me and the identification was a reaffirmation. I could do and could lead and I could understand quickly and implement what I was

learning.” After graduating high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserves. The following year he started his college career. Both of Patrick’s parents went to college. His father fell short of graduating with a bachelor’s degree in education but his mother completed her bachelor’s degree in occupational therapy. The gifted program Patrick was in did not have any effect on his children and their education. Both of his children completed their bachelor’s degree.

Lori. In some cases it was a symbol of academic success to be accepted into the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in 1959, but to someone like Lori it just meant that she was “smarter than the rest of [her] classmates and friends. But in reality, it wasn’t some kind of status symbol just that we would be doing different types of coursework in classes that would be more advanced.” Lori stated it was a more challenging schooling, teachers were there to challenge the students to do better than in the past and to keep the children busy with work that was a grade level higher.

Like any gifted program, the teachers at the school Lori attended, “were always there to help us and to challenge us to do more/better than we had in the past.” Classes were advanced by at least one grade level. These programs gave the children opportunities not available in the regular classrooms. Examples of this were opportunities to study French and to learn about music and the gifted programs. “We studied French all through elementary school, and we had many opportunities to study music (especially string instruments).” Also, children in the program attended more field trips and they could achieve greater knowledge and hands-on experiences with the material they were studying.

Even though the physical building and the playground were much smaller than that her other school, Lori “became an excellent volleyball player.” She fell in love with the sport and was a player on the varsity team in her freshman year of high school. Even though this was not “part of the gifted program per se,” it was a direct influence on where Lori would go with her future choices.

There were also challenges and disadvantages to the program. In Lori's case, it did not have much of an effect on her family, as she was an only child. But it did have an effect on her close friends who were upset that she was going to be separated from them. Another change was transportation. It was a challenge to get to school every day. Eventually her parents set up a carpool system with another family whose daughter attended the same program and lived in the neighborhood. “I didn't like having to travel to and from school every day, and sometimes the work was overwhelming.” The system upset Lori, because it would have been much easier to attend the school located right across the street from her home. “For me, there were times when it was really a pain to have to travel to school rather than walk across the street to the other school.”

Even though she was part of this gifted program, Lori still did not feel it had much impact on her life further down the road. “I can't really say that being in the gifted program had a long-term effect on my life.” She took advantage of a wonderful opportunity given to her, but never had the feeling that she was smarter or more intelligent than her peers. “It was an opportunity that I was able to take advantage of, and accepted that. I don't think I would consider myself smarter and more intelligent than my peers, but I do know that that not many kids from any given class were selected.” She also felt as if she had just made the cutoff score in her testing.

Lori feels very confident about her life now. After the gifted program, Lori attended Northeast Missouri State College. She studied and received her bachelor's degree and a master's degree in health/physical education. She is married and has raised four children while having a 29-year career in the field of education and has had many opportunities to lecture on behalf of health and physical education.

Lori has had success in many educational programs as a teacher and lecturer "Whether or not these accomplishments are a direct correlation to the gifted program itself, I can't say, but whenever opportunities presented themselves, I made sure I took advantage of them."

Rene. Rene only had positive feelings about being labeled gifted during elementary school. The gifted program gave her confidence in her intelligence. "It made me feel special in elementary school but in high school I did not feel any different." She was exposed to many of things others were not and would not have been available without this program and better prepared them for high school classes. The students participated in many after school activities such as bowling and dances that helped the students grow socially. The gifted program instructors were respected by Rene. She thought they were always well prepared for each class. "Actually I thought very highly of the teachers. I think they were all really good teachers." Rene never felt segregated from the students who were not gifted and was able to participate with them during gym class.

The positive reaction towards the gifted program continued to Rene's family as well. She and her brother, three years older, were never close in school so the gifted program did not take away from their relationship. Her parents were very proud of her

intellectual achievement but did not expect much from her. During Rene's childhood, her parents were more worried about her brother being successful. Her father did not believe that college was intended for women. So her parents did not expect her to attend. "In the 1950's, far more was put on my brother to be successful than on me. So it didn't matter that much that I was in the gifted program, but my parents were proud that I was, but it was not 'like she was going to go to college.'" Her extended family was not affected by Rene being accepted into the gifted program, because it was never really discussed. She was able to keep in contact with her old friends from [the old school]. The gifted program did not negatively affect her friendships. She was able to keep in contact with some of her girlfriends through Brownies.

The only challenge Rene had while she was involved in the gifted program was transportation from her home to her new school. She was required to take public transportation. Occasionally she was able to catch a ride with her classmate and neighbor Lori. Moving to a different school and having to take a bus to get there did not bother Rene. She actually enjoyed it and wanted to go to the new school.

It was something I really wanted to do in elementary school. I think back to my brother, he did not want to go to another school, and was happy staying with his friends, although my parents really wanted him to go, so I had it in my mind that it was something I really wanted to do.

Rene did not have much to say about the gifted program in high school.

It is funny because I think more of the elementary program as the gifted program. I know that the classes prepared us for college but I don't think of them as innovative as I did in elementary school . . . The gifted classes in high school

helped prepare me for higher education, although I did not place in advanced placement classes in college.

She does not feel her high school classes were as advanced as her elementary school classes.

Rene feels there were positives and negative aspects of tracking systems that exist in schools. By segmenting the students into groups based on their level of education or intelligence, the students benefit because they can either work at a slower or faster pace. But students do not have the opportunity to experience differences in abilities in the classroom. "But then you do not develop the tolerance if you're not with kids that struggle a little more." Rene enjoyed the tracking program she was part of in high school. She took advanced classes but still had the opportunity to take classes and to interact with non-gifted students in regular classes.

We had class with older kids in high school. So the way they did it might be right. If you meet the needs of the child in academic subjects, maybe it would be good to expose them to other students in some elective type courses.

The gifted program gave Rene the drive to go to college and further her education. "I think it encouraged me to go to college. I think that is the most positive thing that it did for me. It gave me the confidence to carry on my education." Rene received her master's degree from Southeast Missouri State University and is now a teacher. She came from parents who had not attended college, so this was an accomplishment for her. Overall, she feels very happy about her life. Her children went on to college and graduated with bachelor's degrees. Neither of them was involved in the gifted program in their schools. Rene has always expected quality education for her

children after having the opportunity to be part of the gifted program when she was younger.

Darren. Gifted students can experience embarrassment when they are singled out as well as suffer from the added constant pressure to excel. However, Darren, a student who started in a gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in 1959, reported very positive experiences. Darren's IQ was tested in the fourth grade. Because of his high score, he had to change schools to participate in their "gifted" program. Darren did believe that labeling programs as "gifted" did not clearly define what he thought should have been referred to as "challenge program." "The curriculum was challenging for the times (e.g. algebra in eighth grade) and interesting. We also had the opportunity to do special projects like building an ice boat." The pull-out or segregated program might have brought out the shy and quiet Darren. His siblings were 10 and 14 years older, so he had the opportunity to bond with friends who were more his age. In fact, 50 years later, he still socializes with some of these friends. Darren did not believe there were any disadvantages to being in the gifted program. He played with friends after school and enjoyed participating in sports. Again, though, he stressed that the "designations" or "naming" such programs should be considerate of all students: "I think naming some students as 'gifted' does more harm to the self-esteem of the 'non-gifted students' than any benefits accrued by the 'gifted' ones."

Looking back, Darren is positive the "gifted" program helped his academic success at Washington University, where he had a full academic scholarship, and at Lindenwood University, as well as his career in medical device research and development. But he also felt

Each of us would define success differently, using such criteria as financial, academic, job title and responsibilities, commitment to and furtherance of various philosophies, interesting and varied experiences, marriage, friends, children (their happiness and success), self-reliance, self-satisfaction, generosity, leaving the world a better place or helping people.

Darren measures success by “leaving the world a better place.” This feeling might be attributed to many factors, especially his parents. Concerning his goal of “leaving the world a better place,” one might assume that Darren has achieved that goal by raising two children who were in their school district’s Talented and Gifted Program. His daughter received a degree in urban studies at Columbia University and son received a degree in chemistry at Washington University.

Andrea. Many students in the gifted program feel very proud of their accomplishments and how it made their families feel very proud. Andrea faced a challenging issue because her siblings wanted her to stay at their school after she was chosen for the gifted program. With the help of a friend and parents who were very proud of their daughter, Andrea made the transition to be part of the gifted program. After the switch, Andrea found herself being friends with the children from her new school rather than her old neighborhood friends.

The other children in the neighborhood went to [the old school] and I went to [the new school] so I became friends with the students at [the new school] because I was with them every day although we lived in different areas.

The stress that came from the gifted program made Andrea feel sick to her stomach, and it was difficult for her to recover. She loved how the gifted program had a

faster pace, better teachers, and appreciated the coursework. She also enjoyed being exposed to all the useful information that would help her throughout life. With a format that met her needs, Andrea liked sharing her experience with other students who had the same things in common. “I liked learning and being a good student and I enjoyed being around other students that had similar work ethics and drive.” Switching schools was the hardest thing for Andrea because she appeared to lose a lot of her old friends while making new ones at her new school. She appreciated how the program prepared her for high school and college by providing in-depth study skills she used throughout life. Andrea did feel that being a self-contained group and not exposed to regular kids and activities were great disadvantages. They were not part of the larger group.

Transitioning to high school was a wonderful experience for Andrea. It was easy for her because her accomplishments in grade school meant more time for extracurricular activities and more free time. College was also easy for Andrea because of her hard work in grade school, the study skills she developed and the resources she could use to succeed. “I never had to pull all-nighters before final exams and did very well.” The only thing that held Andrea back from a perfect life was always being a perfectionist. Andrea feels there are things in life that she wishes she had accomplished but did not. She moved to Chicago, started teaching, and then stopped teaching to raise her two daughters. Although she felt that she should have gotten more out of her life, she states she had a great life with two intelligent daughters and a nice career as a teacher.

John. John started in the gifted program in fifth grade. He felt the gifted student program challenged him; it kept him from getting bored as he was before fifth grade. John grew up with a sister who was three years older. They were treated differently

because of the grades each was capable of receiving. “She had to work hard to get a B or C and I always seemed to be satisfied with B doing nothing. So if I had to work my butt off to get an A or do nothing to get a B I would do nothing and get a B.” John makes it clear that his family, friends, and other students knew that he was gifted and capable of a lot more. After getting through the boring years from first to fourth grade, John believed fifth grade in the gifted program and beyond forced him to pay attention and prioritize. He liked the format of the program because it segregated him in the classroom with classmates with the same abilities.

Attending a different school than his sister also posed a few problems. His older sister and John were now in different schools and his mother's school involvement became difficult. Trying to participate at both was a challenge. Transportation was also a problem. His dad tried to pick him up sometimes. But he did have to walk approximately three miles instead of three blocks to get home when his father could not pick him up.

From John's perspective the “gifted” program had many advantages and one disadvantage. “The only disadvantage was in friendships.” John was not able to maintain the strong friendships he developed with kids in the first-fourth grades because he entered the gifted program. On the other hand, John was happy that the program did not bore him. Paying attention in the “gifted” program was very important because of the speed of the class.

We had to pay attention because class moved so much faster. I think I did better because we moved faster and we had to pay more attention. Before, when it moved slower I missed a lot because I was bored.

Being in the “gifted” program also made it possible for John to maintain a full schedule and be able to graduate from high school in three and a half years. Throughout high school John began to feel bored again. But he liked that he was able to assist other students when he was just a freshman.

Looking back, John believes that the “gifted” program gave him the motivation to work a little harder than he would in a regular classroom. The “gifted” program appears to have developed John into a very successful businessman. The only thing that John regrets is the fact that he is divorced. Overall, the “gifted” program appears to have had a positive influence on John and helped him to become a good man and a great father to his son.

Luke. Some students in the gifted program felt pressured to succeed which made them feel like they were expected to always be good in whatever they do. Luke was a student in the gifted program. Although he enjoyed it very much he felt he was thought of as a nerd because he had the gifted label. He did not feel much pressure from his parents or extended family due to being gifted, because his brother was also gifted and applied himself much more than Luke did. “It did not have an effect on my brother because he was also labeled gifted. He was a year older than me and really applied himself.” Luke did not experience any difficulties in the gifted program but felt there were such high expectations for him to succeed and do very well in life. He liked the “enrichment” of the program and the teachers because they put positive pressure on him. The main thing Luke questions about the gifted program is the fact that they never really told him what it would lead to or what he should do with it. “One thing I remember is that in the gifted program they never really made it clear what this would lead to. What

was the payoff in the end for us?” He appreciated the structure of the program and also the teachers. Although he had to take the city bus to his new school every day, Luke loved that it gave him some “independence.” He liked that the gifted program kept him from being bored with regular classes and also exposed him to many new things that were available to him. “It kept me and the other gifted children from being bored. It also exposed us to new things, particularly the sciences and foreign languages. It was a nice experience.” He did not like that he started to transition into a “snob” and found himself having a hard time understanding the normal students. “I found myself having difficulty understanding the average Joe. I had trouble being tolerant of people of average intelligence in college.”

When Luke started high school he decided to drop out of the program. He learned from his brother’s experience that the program was going to put a lot of pressure on him so he decided to just drop out of it.

“I did this because I saw the kind of pressure my brother was going through so my parents and I felt it would not be good for me. I moved on, it was the right move for me.”

As far as the tracking system, Luke believes that it should be done by subject matter.

The gifted program had a lifelong effect on Luke. It made him more independent. He felt that it was a great experience and led him on the right path in his life. It made him the person he is today, a thinking man who looks at the world differently and tries to do things the right way. Luke liked the fact that the gifted program was a positive stigma that would be attached to him for the rest of his life. He sees his life as wonderful with

great children and a nice home. He is not rich but he believes he owes a lot of his success today to the gifted program that he attended in grade school.

That may have made me more independent. But I believe my parents influenced me more than anything. As a kid, my parents expected me not to make as many mistakes because I was labeled smart and gifted. It was a good experience in general. It did help make me the person I am today and maybe I perceive the world differently.

The gifted program provided many people the opportunity to set a foundation for a great life. Luke feels he is an example of how hard work in the gifted program allowed him to get a lot out of life.

Micki. Micki was not fazed by being labeled gifted.

It didn't bother me. I really felt that way before that. I was just different from those other kids and didn't have the same interests in the same things. So finding that out and having that label didn't bother me at all.

However, getting along with other children was a struggle. She was an only child and her mother had her at 46. Micki was raised by loving parents who were very proud of her.

My parents had been divorced and got married again and thank God they did that before I was around. They treated me great, they never raised their voice, never laid a hand on me, total love, and they were really proud of me.

Micki did struggle socially with kids that were not gifted, especially on the walks to school where most of the verbal abuse took place.

That was very difficult, there was a lot of animosity and of course I only lived a couple of blocks from school so I was walking to and from school. You know it

takes years to socialize kids; some of them were pretty hateful cusses when they are young.

She wishes that they would have had a separate building for the gifted students so they did not have to deal with all the other students.

Micki felt that she was not as prepared to enter high school as kids coming from other schools. She thought that the gifted program in grade school was too individualized and didn't have a set standard. This included the course planning, the teacher and the quality of the program.

I think the big difficulty was a sense of not feeling as prepared on entering high school as kids who were coming from other schools. Maybe there wasn't parody in the programs. But I think that it was maybe such an innovative thing that the quality, the instructors or the course planning was too individualized and not standardized.

Micki believes her learning ended after eighth grade because her high school teachers were mostly old and nearing retirement, not caring very much about teaching. However, Micki does feel that the teachers' lesson plans in grade school were not very challenging either. That could have led to her difficulties in high school. She looks at many of her friends who are teachers today and cannot believe the same time and effort was put into teaching when she was in school. One teacher that stood out in Micki's mind was her fifth grade teacher who had an interesting way of teaching. Micki enjoyed that she "was very demanding of her students and very straight to the point. She told the students how to get an A and what to do, and then after the student completed the task,

they were done.” This form of teaching stuck out to Micki as a great method and way of doing things.

Micki felt that the program met her needs in grade school, but high school was a different story. In high school, Micki was in a tracking program that had its pros and cons. Micki was always interested in science, and thus excelled in those required classes. She also possessed a love of art and music, which she pursued but was denied because of the required coursework for the Track 1A (gifted track) student. The only music class she had access to was an a-cappella class. Micki is tone deaf, and as a result she was treated unfairly in the class by other students and even the teacher.

I wanted to take a music class. I had to go to an a-cappella choir class with [her teacher] during the eighth period. I am tone deaf! I would sing my little heart out and one time when we were going to go somewhere to perform, I swear to God, [her teacher], looked at me and she said ‘Micki, just move your lips’.

Although this incident tainted her overall experience in the tracking program, she still believes the program was a good idea. Allowing students to become involved in a variety of classes, the tracking program could increase the success rate because students would be able to take in more subjects they enjoy. Another example she gave to describe the result of some lack of teaching in high school was her ninth grade history class. The teacher instructed the class to read a chapter and make up 10 questions about it and answer them. This method of teaching was something unfamiliar to her and other gifted students. There should have been a select group of teachers who taught the gifted students in high school. She even believes one of her high school teachers was an alcoholic because all she would do is sit at her desk and sleep.

Micki felt unprepared for high school. She had a child before she graduated. Micki did not attend college after high school. She was married right after high school and waited until her baby was three-years-old before starting college. She attended Forest Park Community College and Washington University from 1972-1980 and completed two associate degrees in chemistry and nursing while working full time and raising a family.

Julie. For many students being in the gifted program was very meaningful. Julie was very excited to join the program and felt “Proud and honored” to be given the opportunity. When she was first labeled gifted, she did not know what it meant. She was told she would be given the opportunity to learn extra things. “I was excited about this.” She felt as if God granted her a gift to accomplish more in life with her learning abilities. With two intelligent siblings and parents who wanted the best for her, Julie felt that the gifted program was the perfect fit for her. Julie found herself in the middle of her siblings’ learning abilities. Her brother was very intelligent and her twin sister had to work a lot harder to get the work done.

My brother was extremely intelligent and zipped right through his classwork. But my twin sister, on the other hand, had to work a bit harder than he did. Things came easier for him than for my sister.

Julie experienced very few difficulties with the gifted program. She was still able to play with the neighborhood children and find other friends at the new school. Being able to take special classes in math and foreign languages was a joy for Julie. She thoroughly enjoyed the gifted program even though she knew she would have a lot of extra work on her hands. “I remember having special classes in math, and foreign

languages. I knew as a child that there would be a lot of extra work in these classes.” Julie enjoyed all of her teachers and she liked the way they challenged her to make the most of her abilities and become very successful in school. “I really liked my teachers. They challenged me.”

The issue of transportation was a challenge for Julie. She had to take the public bus to and from school every day, which lengthened her day and separated her, further, from her neighborhood friends. Julie saw many advantages to the gifted program. It gave her the opportunity to plan more for college and she also felt that others viewed her as smart.

There were great opportunities in grade school, including taking classes at Washington University, being taught French and moving at a faster pace. Julie also felt that she was taken more seriously when talking to adults. They seemed to think her opinion mattered. Julie also won a scholarship to the University of Missouri-St. Louis and felt the gifted class experience gave her the skills that led to the scholarship opportunity.

The only disadvantage Julie found was that the gifted program separated her from other students at her school.

The only disadvantage I can think of was putting me in the special classes that separated from many other people. I was always separated from people that were not like me and I saw this as a disadvantage. I do not think it was fair.

She did not feel that it was fair to be separated because she was unable to participate in any leadership activities or be involved in school organizations.

As Julie transitioned into high school, she began viewing the program in different ways, all of which were positive. As a life-long effect, Julie feels as though the gifted program gave her many opportunities to be more successful in life. “The high school program was a bit different from elementary school. It was all good for me and I see it as a positive. I enjoyed being challenged.” The program also helped her as an adult. Especially with her life and what she expected from her own children’s schooling. “I always thought back to how I had been educated and wanted the same for my children.” With the gifted program being a guide for living her life Julie feels that her life has been very successful. She has three children she calls, “the most successful thing she ever did.” Julie is proud to be working in the medical field as a secondary success in her life. She loved having the opportunity to raise her children in a good Christian home, with good values and being able to send her children to private schools. For Julie, being in the gifted program set the basis how to live life to its fullest, and make the most of one’s abilities.

Sally. To Sally, being gifted “meant I was objectively smarter than a lot of other people.” Sally felt as if she was pretty much expected to do well in the “gifted” program. “I am an only child. They had high expectations anyway.” Sally felt that the “gifted program was a way for me to learn at my own potential rate.” Although the gifted program posed some difficulties with the amount of homework assigned, she liked the fact that the “gifted” program kept her busy at [school] when she was so bored at her old school. The teachers were excellent with “wonderful sense of humors” and were also very prepared, helpful, and fair. The learning was great in the “gifted” program because it allowed the “gifted” students the opportunity to work faster than the others in the

regular classes. “Learning experiences were maximized because the teacher didn't have to slow down for anyone to catch up. We stimulated each other when we had group projects to do.” For Sally, being “gifted” in high school meant being a little more spoiled than the other students and she also liked that she was able to meet new people.

Overall, the “gifted” program made it a lot easier for Sally to “compete.” “I learned what I needed to do to stay on top and with that confidence I was able to stay there.” When she arrived at Washington University pre-med school, she was able to remain calm and confident she would get the work done when many other students could not handle the pressure. “The gifted program also gave me a solid foundation of the basics on which to build.” The “gifted” program helped Sally have a great life with her husband of 37 years and two intelligent college educated children. Sally is very happy with her accomplishments and feels the gifted program helped her, at a young age, to start planning her life goals.

Carl. Being labeled gifted has varied effects on children. Some are affected adversely, facing prejudice and struggles throughout their childhood. Others love the opportunity to receive more challenging coursework and unique exposure. In the case of Carl, neither was the case. Carl felt indifferent to the gifted program. He went to a different school, was with other students, but still took regular subjects such as math and English.

I guess I felt special about it, we went to a different school with all these gifted people there and I thought, wow, we can learn new things and we would not be in the regular math or English classes and it will be something different. But math and English were still math and English.

Carl's siblings were never in the gifted program. They were much older and had graduated from high school or already moved out. Carl essentially grew up as an only child. His parents supported him, but did not treat him any differently. He does not remember facing any more difficulties than the average adolescent growing up. "No more than any other adolescent. I don't remember. I had problems with school off and on but not with any particular class or topic. Nothing that I recall socially or physically either."

He feels the experience was just like a normal school except that he had to take a public bus to and from school. He remembers nothing particularly special about the classes except the need to do well. Carl remembers one student being sent back to his old school for not performing well enough and recalls the experience was traumatizing. Overall, Carl felt the program was just a part of school. "I remember it being fun. It was just school. When we got there it was just like going to any school. Recess, got into trouble, went home after school. But we did have special things, we learned a foreign language." He had no real idea of what he would do after school, no real goals. All of his friends were graduating and going to college so he did also.

High school was a struggle and I wanted out of there, "this isn't much fun." If all of my friends had gone into the army, I probably would've gone into the army. I was a follower but I did not have a plan or want to be a doctor. Everybody went to college so I went to college. So I guess the lifelong effect is that it got me into college and whatever came from that I will pass on to my daughter.

Overall, Carl was highly apathetic to the program. He made some strong friendships and that encouraged him to attend college, but otherwise Carl has no feelings

one way or the other on the gifted program or on being labeled gifted. He felt his college experience as well was uneventful and typical. Looking back, Carl is satisfied and comfortable with his life.

Marcia. Being labeled gifted was something Marcia truly desired.

I was very pleased and I really wanted it because I had a friend, who lived two doors away, was my sister's age, and she went to [to the gifted school] and I always thought that would be the neatest thing. I knew when they were testing. I sure hoped I would make it.

Growing up she had many friends who were in the gifted program and was thrilled when she was accepted. Her sisters were not gifted and attended a different school, but Marcia still stayed close to her siblings and admits they were always supportive of one another.

It was great! My sisters went to regular public school, but they were always supportive. They just thought it was my thing and they did their thing and that I had a ton of homework. They were very accomplished in the things they did, so it worked out fine. No problems.

Her parents were also very supportive and excited that Marcia received this opportunity. They had to make sacrifices such as paying extra for city buses for Marcia to get to school. But her parents felt it was definitely worth it. Going through the program she felt the workload was intense but experienced no difficulties being labeled “gifted.” She enjoyed the camaraderie of the other students and feels the entire program was great. “The classes were wonderful. You wanted to make sure you did well and we did. I had a teacher in seventh grade who said, ‘you can do more’.”

Marcia was exposed to so many different opportunities that the non-gifted children were never able to experience in grade school.

“I can remember my teachers and the rooms we were in. I remember walking in and having algebra, and French with [French teacher] who was from France and I thought that was the neatest thing in the world.” But we always had special things.

She thought all her teachers in grade school were great and very supportive. “I thought grade school was outstanding and my favorite teacher of all times was my sixth grade teacher who would say, if you are having a little problem, ‘is that all it is?’”

Marcia felt the program had fully prepared her to go to college.

Just exposed us to so many things, to realize that whatever we wanted to do, we could do. The teachers were encouraging us to do more. Sometimes kids of that age needed that push. They get you ready for the next step, high school and college.

She credits the gifted program with giving her the confidence to know she could succeed at anything she wanted.

Marcia has a master’s degree from the University of Missouri. She has two children; both attended private honors school and graduated from the University of Missouri. She has faced struggles in her life, as everyone has, and looking back feels that perhaps she could have done more with her life. But, overall, she is happy and has nothing but wonderful memories when she remembers the gifted program.

Dennis. For many students in the program, being labeled gifted was more of a negative than a positive. For Dennis, being gifted invited others to tease him and it was something that he did not take pride in. Dennis had two sisters who were very bright, but

not in the gifted program. His youngest sister never felt good enough because he was in the gifted program and she was not. "It did make a difference with my younger sister because she felt she was never good enough, especially when she did not get into the same college as me and our other sister." His parents were very proud of his accomplishments and were not hesitant to let him know.

Dennis did not have to go to another school when he went into the gifted program so he knew students in the regular classes. But because of his change of classrooms he found himself losing his old friends when he went into the gifted program, which made him feel a bit neglected. For Dennis, the gifted program in elementary school made him feel behind. He excelled in math classes more than any other. He enjoyed all the extra projects and extra classes he could take because they kept him occupied. Although Dennis had poor study habits in school, he did benefit from the program. However, he did have a couple issues with the program. "It did not meet my emotional and academic needs as a child." Dennis felt as though he was a poor student because he was labeled gifted and others viewed him with such high expectations. "I needed more support. Just because I was labeled gifted, didn't mean I was gifted in everything. In fact, I felt I was actually a very poor student." Dennis did feel the format was very good because he had no needs to be met at the time. Dennis liked that the program introduced him to other classes, such as French, and he was able to go on field trips and make presentations. He saw no disadvantages to the program, other than the occasional teasing. But they did not bother him much.

As Dennis made the transition into high school, he found himself having the same experiences he had in elementary school. "Struggled in some classes and excelled in

others.” He hit a few rough patches in high school “the problems I had had to do with my study habits. I was a slow reader.” He also found himself barely knowing any French after he had taken four years of it in elementary school. Dennis believes that today’s tracking systems are better than in the past because it is more on a subject-to-subject basis. “It seems to be better today than it was. Tracking is necessary on a subject by subject basis.” With no lifelong effect from the gifted program, Dennis “might have gotten a little farther along quicker. And when he was there, he was there.” Dennis still views his life as great. He has a very happy family life and a very spiritual mindset.

Peter. Being labeled gifted for some students doesn't mean too much, they just tested into the program. “When I underwent the testing in fourth grade, I did not know what it was for and what the results meant.” Peter did not think it was a big deal; it was just something that was supposed to happen. Peter had little help from his family with extracurricular activities and homework and thought of himself as an independent worker.

I always was an independent worker. Because both of my parents worked and, especially after they were divorced, it was up to me to get up in the morning and get ready for school. No one helped me with homework.

With hardly any disadvantages to the program, Peter called the experience great. He made the most of his opportunities: Saturday morning classes at Washington University, and foreign language classes as part of the regular everyday schedule.

I thought it was a great experience. I had great teachers. I made new friends. I was offered educational opportunities that were not offered to others at the time

and that have not been offered in the same way to others since the program was dismantled some years later.

At the time of the gifted program Peter did not realize how special it was to be a part of it. Without it, he would not have worked as hard and accomplished as much in his life.

At the time I did not realize how special the program was or that it was very innovative. I was in school to get an education and I would have achieved had the program not existed. I probably would not have worked as hard had I stayed in the regular education program and I would not have learned as much.

Socially, the gifted program offered Peter access to many students who were interested in the same things. Although, immature at times, especially towards the French teacher, he did feel all the teachers inspired him and gave him a great desire to learn. Peter called the innovative approaches to education and the fact that he didn't have to switch schools the greatest advantages of the gifted program.

The gifted program prepared Peter for a life of success in college, graduate school, and even beyond. "It laid the foundation for a desire to learn and for my success in the educational world." The gifted program helped Peter complete a medical degree and if not for his health issues, the program would have set the standard for a perfect life.

Rose. For some people, being labeled gifted can lead to more self-esteem and greater motivation.

Self-esteem. Not something I would brag about. You know I would openly tell kids that I was on that track. I remember learning the abacus in fifth grade and taking French. I ended up getting a minor in French in college.

Being gifted was something that she believed was expected of her from her parents. “You have to remember that my parents were immigrants. They expected that. You have to work hard and get good grades. Anything extracurricular was stupid, gym was stupid, and you just had to study.”

Even though she experienced difficulty with transportation back and forth to school, Rose found a way to still make the most of the gifted program. “It was wonderful. I loved it!” Rose liked the fact that she could learn more and she believed all her teachers were wonderful and very supportive. “I really did. I loved to learn the things we were taught like literature, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, um, the French was great, science math and art classes. I just loved it!” The transportation issue, along with leaving her old school to start the gifted program, was difficult for Rose but she adjusted in order to be successful in the program, “I think, for one thing, there was a lack of community. When you go to a school in your neighborhood there is a sense of community, you can have an inner click. It wasn’t that way.” Rose also believed that tracking systems in public schools today are “terrible.” “I think that they are terrible. I really do. I hope they do not do that. I know that my kids in California did not have them. The people that are affected most are the ones in track ‘C’.”

The gifted program caused some students like Rose to become burned-out on school. “I know I got really burned out in college, I was sick of studying, I really was. I changed majors so many times.” But Rose knew she wanted to become a language major. She was unable to do so because the college she attended in Cape Girardeau did not offer the coursework needed. Because of finances, she attended college in Cape Girardeau instead of the University of Missouri, which offered the classes she desired.

My parents would not allow me to go to the University of Missouri so when I went to Cape where I took art classes and that was great. I eventually had to stop them because I couldn't afford the supplies.

The gifted program set standards for Rose to live her life and achieve much in her life. She still regrets her experiences with college and not doing the things she wanted to do. Overall the gifted program helped her raise her three children and has given her a rewarding life.

Joan. For some students, being in the gifted program was a "given" because other family members were already involved in it. That was the expectation for Joan. However, Joan had to be retested to make sure that the gifted program was right for her. By not answering certain questions on the test the first time, she was not accepted into the program. Joan then took the test a second time and answered all the questions, even if she was unaware of the correct answer. Joan felt a lot of pressure because her sister and brother were both in the gifted program. Both were considered brighter than her. Actually I had to be tested twice, my sister was automatically accepted and I was not. I remember the story that my parents told me that either we both were going to go or neither one of us would go.

Her parents were very involved in their church and just told Joan to do her best in school and in life. She faced a big challenge because she was not interested in math and physics like her sister. "I didn't perform well. Sometimes I didn't think I had the ability to do the more academically challenging classes like math." She decided to try to take classes in high school that appealed to her. "I remember I took Home Living and Home Economics and that is what I majored in college."

Joan clearly remembers being with other students from other schools in the city. She loved that the gifted program enabled her to go on field trips in the seventh and eighth grades.

We went to Jefferson City during seventh or eighth grade, which the regular students didn't get to go. We also went to The Audubon Society and made regular trips to the Art Museum and I don't think the other kids got to go on these. So we had opportunities but I was never aware of the fact that we were doing something special that the others were not doing.

Joan calls the teachers in the program "very demanding and wanting to receive the best out of all of their students, they wanted to prepare for high school." The main reason Joan continued to be in the program was because her sister. "Without her, I'm not sure I would have survived because I don't make friends easily." She loved all of the opportunities afforded her through the program and especially the Fine Arts. "We had all the Fine Arts and those are the things I love and I excelled in those areas."

Throughout life, in high school and beyond, Joan was faced with many challenges. In high school, she didn't fit in with any clique. "I wasn't part of the popular crowd, the jocks and the cool girls." She was viewed differently by her teachers and peers because of her participation in the gifted program. "I didn't like high school. I would not want to go back to those years." Joan preferred being with the other gifted students. The gifted program left Joan with a "positive attitude," she feels lucky to have been part of it, and overall, made her feel very special in her life.

I think it was a positive stigma, even though I didn't feel like I really belonged there. I probably have always thought that I was lucky to be a part of it because I

had to be tested twice. I have always been hesitant to speak up. But as far as life-long, I think it was special.

Theresa. For many in the gifted program, the feeling of being smart is what comes to their minds. Theresa felt being gifted had no major effect on her family but they were very pleased that she was in the program, especially her father. “My mother was very pleased, but it was my father who articulated his pleasure about it.” Theresa loved all the classes in the program and also appreciated all the teachers. “They challenged me and were very good teachers.” She also loved the format of the program and all its aspects. Going to a different school didn't have much of an impact on Theresa as she was able to ride the public bus with her brother.

The grade school program had many advantages from foreign language classes that non-gifted students were unable to take, “We were exposed to foreign languages that non-gifted classes did not get.” Although Theresa felt there were many advantages to the gifted program in grade school, she was not as appreciative of the gifted program in high school. She did not like having all the same classes with the same people in the program because it made her feel very limited in the classes that were available to her. “Overall it was not that great a program.” She felt that the gifted program in high school did a very poor job preparing her for college. “The counseling was not that good for those in the gifted program. I was disappointed that all the extra work and classes I took did not mean more as I prepared for college.”

In some ways, the lifelong effect of the program was negative. People had such high expectations of the things that she should accomplish in life because she was involved in the gifted program. If Theresa could relive her life, she may not have

participated in the program. She would not have felt the pressure of having to succeed in life because of the program she was involved in.

In some ways it was a negative thing because if people knew I was in a gifted program they might have unrealistic expectations of what my abilities may or may not have been or what I should have done or could have done with my life. If I could do it over again, I might not have participated in the gifted program.

Although Theresa did not fully appreciate everything that the gifted program had to offer and felt a lot of pressure to succeed, she still feels that she has had a great life having three children and a happy marriage of over 40 years.

Debra. Labeling, for many people, has a potential to make them feel very special and place a big emphasis in shaping their self-image for the rest of their lives. For Debra being in the gifted program made her parents very proud. But at the times, her brothers were jealous of her being in the program. “I think my being labeled gifted made my two younger brothers closest in age to me feel a bit jealous, or possibly even inferior.” She experienced many advantages in the gifted program with few disadvantages. “It really was the best experience of my life, so exciting and so much fun.” While feeling bored and lonely at her old school, Debra referred to the switch to the new school an exciting experience because everyone there wanted to meet new people. “We all seemed to share a sort of mental alertness and a similar sense of humor.” Debra made many lifelong friends at the new school and she appeared to get along with all the people including the boys who “respected her” and considered her an “equal.”

The format of the program definitely met my needs. It was “total immersion.” I don't think that being pulled out for only certain periods of the day would have had near

the impact nor made us feel as special, nor given us the opportunity to form the bonds with other students.

With classes and teachers that were very challenging and a format that met her needs, Debra loved the switch to the gifted program where she had some of the best teachers available and an academic atmosphere that was very competitive.

Debra's family did encounter a few financial problems. With no family car, Debra was forced to take a city bus to school and often had to find rides home with friends. Although the financial aspect was a bit tough on her family, she is still unable to come up with any disadvantages from the program. Looking back on the gifted program, Debra developed self-confidence and will always feel "special." "Being labeled 'gifted' made me feel very special, of course. It played a big part in shaping my self-image and occurred at a crucial stage of that formation process, at the age of nine-years-old."

Unfortunately, the program has made Debra feel like a bit of an underachiever because of her lack of schooling and no success in business. There were times in her career Debra felt she was smarter than her bosses. She wishes she would have gone through more than two years of college.

A lot of my jobs have been support staff' or clerical in nature, although I did have a career in advertising and public relations that spanned 10-15 years before I started raising a family. I am now back in one of those "support staff' positions." When working in this type of job, I've always been very uncomfortable knowing that a lot of my superiors view people in this type of position as inferior to them when I feel that I'm actually their intellectual equal or possibly even superior. So in a sense, at times, I have suffered from a bit of an inferiority complex.

Overall the gifted program gave Debra a very comfortable life with a lovely marriage of 26 years and two intelligent daughters. Although Debra has not accomplished everything in life that she had wished for, the gifted program gave her a fantastic experience and some wonderful lifelong friends.

Susan. Susan felt that being gifted was a responsibility. Her older sister was already in the program and she felt very relieved to be accepted into it as well. “I remember that I was worried that I would not get into it because my sister was in it to begin with. It was a big relief when I passed.” Growing up, being in the gifted program did not really impact her family life. Her sister was in the same program, so they were both at the same level. Her parents did not have much reaction either. However, they did expect a lot of her being in the program and never rewarded excellence, since that was what she was supposed to do as a gifted student.

Not a big effect, my mother expected me to do well. They never said “this is great Susan, you got all A’s,” I was expected to do that. My mother was really smart and she never went to college because she could not afford it. My dad didn’t even finish high school but I think they were both smart, but not gifted, but we didn’t talk about it.

She remembers everything came easily to her. If it was not easy, she did not want to bother. Although if she did not get an A, she was dissatisfied. Susan remembers that the field trips and various experiences were great, but also recalls the non-gifted students being jealous that “those kids” got to experience those things. “I liked the field trips. It wasn’t that I didn’t like school, but I didn’t love it. We had a lot of opportunities. Other students would bad mouth ‘those kids’ for getting to do those things.” The biggest

hardship for Susan was changing schools and not being able to hang out with the friends who lived in her neighborhood.

I think it was hard on me because I was being separated from my friends and no one at the new school lived by me so we couldn't hang out. My friends from the old neighborhood were there but I had homework.

She definitely enjoyed the learning aspects of the program and felt it gave her confidence and a helping hand in the college.

Being exposed to a lot more hard-core things in terms of school work, ideas, math, science and those types of things. We had exposure to cultural things but I think other kids had that too but we had the math and science. I can remember going around in high school pretending that we were French.

Today Susan has two children. Both were in gifted programs. She felt that her program was better because it was full time. The program for her children was only one day a week and she feels that was a definite disadvantage.

I think it did, [format met her needs] I tried to be open and honest about it when I talked to my son about his program. The program he was in was only one day a week. But that one day a week they did all kinds of stuff, but was not structured.

At the time, ours was the best. I know they devoted a lot of resources to it.

Both her children graduated from college and have degrees in the sciences.

Susan has not really stayed in touch with many of her gifted classmates and has faced some adversities in her life.

I have had some bad things happen, divorce, both of my parents died the same year. My mother had breast cancer and I had breast cancer. And yet I feel

incredibly lucky. I am really into exercise and the outdoors, which keeps me happy. I love to read and I have a lot of interests and I think you can tie it back to the program.

Gene. For many students in gifted programs in the past, the experience was better than being in a normal school room. Gene felt that being in the gifted program did not have much of an impact on people around him. “My parents expected it because of my brother and they were very happy about it.” While Gene’s parents expected him to do well in the program, he also felt some animosity from other students who were not in the gifted program. “In grade school I remember animosity from the regular students in the same grade, but not so much in high school. My neighborhood friends didn’t have a problem with it.”

He also disliked the mile he had to walk to school during the first year in the program. “I didn’t like walking over a mile to grade school when I lived across the street from one.” Although he had a feeling of “remoteness” from the other children in his neighborhood, he was taught how to think logically which helped him have a successful life. “The only disadvantage was the feeling of remoteness from the neighborhood kids. The program challenged me and taught me how to study early on and it helped make high school and college fairly easy.”

Looking back, the gifted program helped Gene in his career as a civil engineer. It gave him the motivation and courage to keep moving on in life and made it possible for him to make the most of his education. “It helps to think of yourself early in life as smart because learning and studying doesn’t intimidate you. The program also taught logical thinking at an early age which can be a key to a successful life.” The program also

helped him in his basketball career at the University of Missouri-Rolla by challenging him to achieve at a higher level and demand more of himself.

Joe. Joe had both positive and negative experiences as part of the public school gifted program. The opportunity gave him a chance to get closer to his father and enjoy more time spent with his mother. Both parents seemed well educated even though neither had the chance for a college education. In fact his father did not graduate from high school, but Joe said his father:

was one of the most educated men I ever knew and he loved learning. Mom was very intellectual, graduated from high school at 16. She and I would get together and do a number of crazy puzzle things and brainteasers and a lot of bonding together, it was good. It was a positive relationship.

Being in the gifted program had no effect on Joe's family since he had two older siblings in the program also.

Joe did run into several problems with the education he received including the fact that higher expectations were required of him and also his wide range of vocabulary lead others too assume he was putting on airs and showing off. Academically he never learned the importance of doing homework. "I never learned to do homework and that persisted through most of my life." Personally, the change of school was eye-opening for Joe. He saw the differences between the new school and his old one in the "ghetto." His old teacher made him sit alone because she told him there was nothing to interest him in the class. "I sat at a desk by myself because the teacher said there was nothing going on in the class that would interest me." Joe admits that it was a horrible situation. In his new school, Joe wanted to show that he was tough. The first day of classes Joe

approached a student and told the boy to punch him. While being hit, Joe just stood there and asked for another punch.

The day I arrived I went up to him and I said are you the toughest kid around? He said “yea.” I said punch me in the stomach as hard as you can and he did and I laughed. I said “do it again.” I had to prove that I was a tough kid. That was the model I took. I wanted to show my toughness to those around me so I would not become a pushover.

Joe felt the program did not judge the ability of each student as an individual. As an example, Joe’s son did poorly in one gifted program. He felt “outside the mainstream” and did not feel he belonged there. But when the family moved to another district, he excelled in their program. The tracking program in high school, in his mind, needed work. “Doing it [testing children’s abilities] on the basis of one test seems to be really scary.”

The long-term effect of the program on Joe was interesting. Joe had opportunities his parents never had, the gifted program and the chance to go to college. At the same time, the program did not provide him the information he needed about college and the opportunities available, including scholarships and grants that Joe could have received.

The biggest thing I think they screwed up was they didn’t just march us into college. My parents didn’t know what a scholarship was. I didn’t apply for anything. I probably could have gotten a great scholarship to a great school. I used up my savings by the end of freshman year and I got a job. So I was not able to have a regular academic career. What they should have done was say “ok here is the raw material let’s see what we can get him into.”

Robin. For many students, the gifted program had far less impact on them when they were young, but began to affect them as they got older. Robin did not feel impacted by being labeled “gifted” when she was young. She had a sister in the program so it was pretty much expected that she would do well, succeed and be a great student. “I think back then it didn’t impact me too strongly because my sister was in the gifted program so it was expected of me.” Having a very close friend in the program was great and with her sister in the program, her parents expected her to follow. Robin enjoyed all the field trips that were part of the gifted program and she could recall no negatives being labeled “gifted.” “The enrichment classes, for one thing, all those advantages that we would not have experienced and the academic push we received was terrific.” With a format that fit her needs, she was able to get that “academic push” and learned how to make the most of her abilities. The teachers in the program had different impacts on Robin, some she liked, others she disliked. She saw many advantages and liked how the program stretched her abilities and it also made schooling very enjoyable. “Looking at my children I can see when you have greater ability, learning things was fun. Things were designed to benefit me. It was about stretching yourself.” Although the program was very hard, Robin saw few disadvantages with it.

In high school and throughout her life Robin has reflected on the gifted program and felt she could have gotten more from her high school experience. “I wish we had had more college credit because we could have saved some money.” She enjoyed having friends in high school who were not in track 1A. “It did not keep me from making friends from the other tracks. My friends were not all in track 1A, but my boy friends were. We did still group together.” It did not bother Robin to be friends with the other

kids she just “slipped in and out of her comfort zone.” She felt the lifelong benefits of the gifted program were they made her a person who loves to explore and learn new things. It made her expect much more of herself, while staying grounded and not getting overwhelmed by pressure. “It stretched me. It made me a person that likes to explore. Who knows if a regular classroom would have done that? Who could say?” The gifted program set the foundation for a great life for Robin. It was very hard for her but she learned to motivate herself to get her work done. Even today, the program is part of her and has helped her have a very healthy and happy life. “I am happy and healthy at my age. What would I change? What can I say, a different path may have taken me a different place but I am happy.”

Jack. I'm not sure that being “gifted” meant anything to me at first. All I really knew was that I was going to a different room and have a different teacher than most of my friends when I started fifth grade in the fall of 1959. I do not think I really understood it at all. After I had an idea of what it was I think my first reaction was “wow, I’m smarter than those other kids are.” Once I actually began the classes I realized that everybody in that class was smart. I was lucky in one way, I stayed in the same school where I had been for a few years. But, I did go through issues of teasing from former classmates and older kids who were not in the program. There were times when I downplayed being “gifted” and other times when I saw it as a badge of honor. As I grew older I felt very proud of the fact and was glad I had the opportunity even though I did not take full advantage of it.

I do not think being in the program had much effect on my siblings. I am the oldest of six and a couple of my siblings were not even born when I went into the

program. I actually ended up being the only one of the six accepted into the gifted program and as I got older, that fact really amazed me. I was probably the worst student of the family, the least motivated in school. In fact, of the five who went to college, I was last to graduate. If there were any particular problems with my siblings because of me being in the program I do not remember them and none of them seemed to be resentful. Maybe that was because I was the oldest and that there is 16 years difference between me and my youngest sibling. My siblings and I are all close to this day and I think the closeness of our family also reduced some of those issues. I credit that closeness to our mom and dad.

I think my parents were very proud, especially my mom. She told everyone I was in the program. Dad was a little more conservative and did not say much, especially when I frequently screwed up. I do not remember anything in particular happening with my extended family. I think they were proud. But there were so many cousins (I have 42 first cousins) that everyone had enough to do taking care of their own kids. I do know my grandmother was very proud. I was her favorite and I could do no wrong. I have an uncle who I think struggled with the situation. He was the head of the math department at my high school and I'm sure he was frequently embarrassed by his underachieving nephew. As I said before, many of my former friends who did not go into the gifted program gave me a hard time and that was the most difficult part about staying at the same school. Most of my classmates in the gifted program came from other schools so they did not know many people at my school. I think most of us were taunted at times because we were in the gifted program. We each dealt with it differently. My impression is that the harassment was also different for boys than girls. At that age, boys are

beginning to show signs of competitiveness, athleticism, and macho posturing. When these feelings are prevalent and there is a group of students who are separated because they are intelligent it sets up situation that can and did erupt into, at the very least, taunting but occasionally even led to fighting. I understand the girls had similar situations, although I do not remember them being as evident.

Besides the occasional taunts, my difficulties were due to lack of motivation and maturity on my part. Although I enjoyed learning, I did not enjoy going through the motions of doing homework. I have said many times, “if I had been able to just go to class and take tests, my grades would have been considerably higher in grade school and in high school.” But I fought the system all the way through. That lack of motivation stuck with me for a good part of my life. I did not have the discipline nor the maturity needed to be a good student until much later in life. That did not mean I did not learn, it just meant that I learned in a different way. I often used any God-given talent I had to get out of doing things rather than just getting the work done. Despite poor grades in high school, I was expected to go to college and the only reason that I was accepted was because of my test scores. My high school grades were pretty bad. I carried that lack of maturity and motivation through two years at two different colleges. It took the Army, especially basic training, to start turning me around.

My experience with the gifted program during elementary school was a mixed bag. On one hand, we were given the opportunity to experience a lot of things that the regular classes did not have the opportunity to do. We had an art teacher from the St. Louis Art Museum who came to our class. We were taught French, which was unheard of in elementary school. We were also offered the opportunity to experience some

classes at Washington University. We had the opportunity to go to concerts of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and field trips to the Art Museum. We went on a field trip exploring the architecture of St. Louis and in eighth grade we built an ice boat in the classroom. In fifth grade, we completed the course work for fifth and sixth grade, and for the rest of grade school we were always doing class work one year ahead of our grade level. The other part of this was my lack of effort! I enjoyed the field trips and learned a lot from them but I did not take advantage of the educational opportunities the gifted program afforded me. I just squeaked by. I could have done so much more with the opportunities given me. Again, maybe it was that lack of maturity.

I am not sure what needs I had in elementary school. I liked the idea of being put in a separate classroom with kids my age. In the other classroom there were students who had been held back a year or so and it seemed like they picked on us. The pull-out program did provide us with opportunities and pushed us. However, some of us did not take full advantage of it.

I thought our teachers were very good. Although, at times, I think we were a little arrogant and thought that we were smarter than they were. I had a male teacher in fifth grade and had him again for seventh grade. I also had a male teacher for eighth grade. I think that was unusual for the times. The vast majority of teachers for elementary school at that time were females. I did have a female teacher for sixth grade and she was probably the toughest one of them all. They did push us and expected more of us. My only problem was that I fought them most of the time. I just would not apply myself and only did what I had to do to get by. The enrichment programs afforded us were great and the opportunity to interact with other intelligent kids, the faster pace of the classes was

really for me. I liked the fact that they gave me a lot of information. I was like a sponge. I did most of my learning in the classroom, not outside the classroom.

Sometimes the segregation from the other students was a problem, especially socially. Even though I knew a lot of the students from the regular classes I did get some harassment from some of them primarily in the form of name-calling. I also think there was some jealousy because we were able to do a lot of things that other classes did not get to do. It was interesting when the school involved us in intramural sports. In seventh and eighth grade, we played flag football against the regular classes. The other classes had students that were 14, 15, even 16-years-old. They were obviously bigger and stronger and faster than most of us. But that did not deter us. We could not beat them physically, so we decided to beat them mentally. We developed a lot of intricate plays to take advantage of their aggressive style. And it worked! This probably did not help that relationship between the classes but it sure felt good.

The program in high school was not as focused as it was in grade school and the enrichment was non-existent. We were still taking classes beyond our grade level but in many cases we were mixed in with other students who were older than us. Again social issues became problematic. I think because of the age differences. But those issues would have come about with many freshmen or sophomores in high school. I think the biggest problem in high school was that they weren't real sure what to do with us, particularly as we got closer to graduation. They did not do a very good job of advising us in preparing us for college. The vast majority of the students in the program were going to be the first person in their families to go to college. The counselors expected us to go to college but did not enlighten us on the process. We probably all should have

received some kind of advanced placement when we went to college but were not told about it. They also did not do a good job with scholarship opportunities. And most of the parents did not understand the process either.

Although I did not thrive in the academic setting I was afforded, I still feel it was a great opportunity. I also feel tracking systems are a good method of identifying the needs of all students. We must cultivate our gifted students as much as we need to aid those who have special needs. For me, I think the lifelong effect of the gifted program has been very positive, even though I did not take advantage of it at the time. I know I learned a lot more from the program than had I not been in it. As I grew older, I look back on the program with fond memories and with the realization that I did take some things away from it. I made some great friends, had some experiences that I would not have had otherwise and learned some hard lessons that have served me well.

I have a great wife, son and daughter-in-law. I have great friends, good health and enjoy life. I probably would not have been able to say this 25 years ago. I knocked around in various jobs trying to find my niche and surprisingly, until I became a teacher (of all things!), I finally found my place.

Emerging Themes

As the interviews developed I realized that I had unconsciously begun taking mental notes of common threads that seemed to come to light. The common threads I had thought about were my starting point for coding the transcriptions of the interviews. As I read through each interview, I made note of those common threads but I also found additional common responses to consider as emerging themes. This open coding method allowed me to highlight possible themes and evaluate them as a group in order to trim

them down to the final seven emerging themes: (a) expectations, (b) social, (c) label, (d) spiritual/religious, (e) impact, (f) lack of high school support, and (g) lifetime well-being.

Emerging Theme #1: Expectations. I do not think the students themselves had any great expectations when they began the program. When you are 10-years-old you did what your parents told you to do without asking any questions. Most of us did not even realize when we took the test in fourth grade what the ramifications of that would be. So when we started the fifth grade, even if our parents had tried to explain it to us, most of us really did not have any idea what we were getting ourselves into. All we knew that we were in a new classroom with new classmates and a new teacher. We did learn very quickly that there were expectations put on us. Theresa stated,

In some ways it was a negative thing because if people knew I was in a gifted program they might have some unrealistic expectations of my abilities that may or may not be true or and what I could and could not do. And as I grew older what I should have done or could have done with my life. If I could do it over again, I might not have participated in the gifted program.

We found out that we were going to do fifth grade and sixth grade work in one year, we were going to be taking French lessons and we were going to be given the opportunity to participate in extra programs not available to other students. And on top of all that we slowly began to understand why all of this was happening to us. I am sure it only seemed like a lot of work to us at the time but as time passed we began to get a better understanding of what was expected of us and why. Even at 10-years-old we knew a little bit about the Cold War. Our school was a fallout shelter and we had periodic air raid drills in case we were attacked. As time passed we also realized we were expected to

be part of the plan to keep pace with our Cold War adversaries. I do not believe many of us were really familiar with the “National Defense Education Act” which helped fund this program but we began to understand the expectations. More homework, less free time, and more pressure. Pressure to succeed, pressure to be the best you could be. Joe mentioned that the expectations were a “burden that I think became almost inconsequential to many because our expectations were set so very high and were pretty unreachable. Not just by other people and their expectations but my own.”

There were other expectations besides academics. I think we are expected to be more mature and more socially adept. Through these conversations I have found that the opposite was probably true. We were probably more immature and shy than our contemporaries who were not in the gifted program. Kevin stated, “Educational opportunities were available but I was so young and immature that I did not take advantage of all the gifted program had to offer. This immaturity continued all through high school.” Some of this may have been because we were all the same age in the same grade where some of the regular classrooms had older students who were both more physically and mentally mature. I agree with Kevin that our immaturity actually carried over into high school.

Emerging Theme #2: Social. When we were tested for the gifted class and were given the opportunity to participate in the program, we left behind friends that remained in the regular classes. In some cases we left the school that we had been attending and left behind neighborhood friends. Dana commented,

Again, I think it was the social part of it. If it had been in my community school. If that would have been the way the program was presented, at my neighborhood school, it might have made a difference for me.

In other cases some of us remained in the same school but changed classrooms and left friends behind as well but still saw them during recess or some school activities. But even though most of us continued to live in the same neighborhoods the relationships with the neighborhood children was different. According to Amy, "We had good testing ability to get into the program. But we might not have had social intelligence or those things. But we had the ability to think and to do certain math skills, reading skills."

Suddenly we were treated differently, usually, subtly, but differently. It was difficult to understand, we were the same person we were when school ended last semester but now things had changed. But as with the program itself we adjusted. Some adjusted better than others but we survived the transition to the gifted program and the occasional taunts on the playground or in the neighborhood. Some of students had to ride a public bus or car pool to get to school. Several of the students spoke of that experience as being very scary at first but that it turned out to be a positive since it gave them a feeling of self-confidence.

As we began high school many of us felt the same things that many freshmen feel. That little fish in a big pond feeling (we did not have middle schools so it was eighth grade to high school). This feeling was compounded by our somewhat isolated situation in grade school and the fact that we were now in some classes with not only non-gifted students but with upperclassmen because of the advanced classes we were taking. Theresa stated, "It did not have much of an effect on me in elementary school. I felt

more isolated because all of my classes were with the same people all the time. High school was definitely more difficult than elementary socially.” We tended to band together although we began to spread our wings somewhat and explore other things. By doing so we began to grow emotionally and socially as well as continuing to grow academically.

Emerging Theme #3: Label. The question, what is that? was probably the first question we asked after receiving the gifted label. I am sure the explanations were varied—you are smart, you are smarter than most, you can do more, we expect more. Regardless of the varied explanations, it became a label, one we would have for the rest of our lives. A positive label is better than a negative one; but, nevertheless a label. Some embraced it. Patrick stated, “It was an honor to be so labeled.” Some downplayed it. Chris said, “when I was with my [new school] friends I tried to act smart and when I was with my [old school] friends I tried to play down that aspect.” Some did not think much about it. Many were surprised because giftedness and gifted teaching was something few people outside of educators and psychologists knew existed.

In grade school the fact that the gifted classes were separate from the other classes made it difficult to hide. Everyone knew who we were so we were easy marks for taunting. Most of us downplayed the gifted part of our grade school experience as much as we could. Dana thought,

It had some negative connotations especially from friends from the old school and especially some teasing with being called a *brain*. I was ostracized from my neighborhood. I was being transported to another school so for me it was a negative thing.

We would try to blend in as much as possible. The girls seemed to have an easier time of it, they matured faster than the boys and seemed to get along better with the boys at the other end of the hall but I am not sure how well that set with the girls down the hall.

It was a little easier to hide the gifted label in high school. We just fit in with all the other freshmen. However in some of the mixed classrooms it was still an issue, one that we were not accustomed to in the classroom. We were used to being in a fast paced classroom with other gifted students and then we found ourselves in classrooms where the intellectual setting was completely different. This did cause problems for some. Some of us rose above the situation and some found ourselves slacking off because we did not have to work very hard to pass. Lori expressed,

Being labeled *gifted* meant that you were smarter than the rest of your classmates/friends. But in reality, it wasn't some kind of status symbol, just that we would be doing different types of coursework and classes would be more advanced.

As most of us got older we looked back on our years in the gifted program and realized what a great opportunity it had been and have been able to embrace the idea of our giftedness. The label, just as the program, has become a point of pride and perhaps an example of the self-fulfilling prophesy.

Emerging Theme #4: Spiritual/Religious. Another theme that arose during these interviews was one of spirituality or great religious faith. While the spirituality or the faith of the participants was not covered with an interview question, the majority of the participants spoke openly about their faith and spirituality. Jeanie stated, "I believe in

a big God—a God of tolerance, love, and forgiveness who teaches his children through different faiths but loves them all equally and wants us all to be his instruments of peace.” Some were raised in a traditional church family while still others explored their spirituality before finding the right fit for them. One of the participants in this study is a member of the clergy and one owns a business that deals with spirituality and religion of all faiths. Many of the participants thanked God for the talents and their life opportunities. Robin said, “I believe it is my faith that makes me rate my life as a 10. People have asked why I didn't pursue this and that, but my faith makes me believe that I am right where He wants me.” They were also grateful for the strength they were given to help them overcome adversity in their lives.

Emerging Theme #5: Impact. When the participants talked about the impact of the program on their lives it came in several different areas: academically, logistically, emotionally, and socially. To some the academic impact was immediate, for others the impact was not recognized until later in life. Peter thought it was a great experience. I had great teachers. I made new friends with those who transferred into the program. I was offered educational opportunities that were not offered to others at the Saturday morning program at Washington University was a great addition to my education. Those who experienced an immediate impact were perhaps more driven, more mature, or understood the meaning of being gifted and the advantages of the program. Others, like myself, did not recognize the opportunity at the time and did not take advantage of it. Debra stated,

It was “totally immersion.” I don't think that being pulled out for only certain periods of the day would have had near the impact are made us feel a special, nor given us the opportunity to fund the bonds with other students.

The impact for some of us came much later. The light finally went on and we realized our potential and were able to find our way. Jack (researcher) “It took me many years to complete college; I took a long and more difficult path because of my lack of effort and understanding when I was younger.” Even though some of us did not take full advantage of the program we still benefited from it. We all took bits and pieces of the program and put them to good use whether we consciously realized it or not. The gifted program set some high goals and standards for us at a very young age and showed us our capabilities and opened our minds to some of our shortcomings.

Logistically some students had to be transported to other schools. This put a burden on some of the families because the cost and the inconvenience. Most of the families only had one car and the students had to ride public buses to get to school.

Debra said,

Going to another school was a bit of a logistical and financial hardship on my family, because it meant I had to pay for a bus pass rather than just walk to school, and it was difficult for my family to attend school events, because we did not own a car.

John felt the effect in a couple ways:

Actual school, not a lot of impact except for transportation back and forth and mother's involvement. Again change of friends, of course. People do not like change and there were a lot of changes. They do not like to mess with their

comfort zone. So all of a sudden you were being graded against students that were every bit as smart as you. Certainly it had an impact.

Emotionally and socially the students had different feelings and experiences.

Lori said,

I was an only child, so there was no impact on anyone else. My parents were proud that I was considered an “achiever.” But, my really close friends were upset that we were going to be separated and not in the same school (for the elementary grades).

Peter had a different perspective:

Since I stayed at the same school I had attended prior to entering the program, the impact of being segregated was not great because everything was familiar and I was still with all of my old friends as well as the new ones. Although the school did sometimes foster a wall between us.

Patrick had another idea about the impact of the program:

It seemed to meet my needs then, but now I think that I would like to see it done differently in light of my life and what I find valuable. But each child is different and impact is based upon so many variables.

The program had various effects on this group. Some positive, some negative, some took better advantage of the program than others but we all got something out of it. Perhaps this is another example of the self-fulfilling prophesy. It did have an impact on us—a lifetime impact.

Emerging Theme #6: Lack of High School Support. The biggest disappointment was the high school experience of the gifted program. Some of the

students did not even realize that the high school experience was part of the gifted program. Theresa noted, “The counseling was not that good for those in the gifted program. I was disappointed that all the extra work and classes I did not mean much done on paper as I prepared for college.”

We still were taking classes in advance of our grade level but the enrichment stopped and for many classes we were no longer grouped with only gifted children. Peter stated,

The program prepared me to succeed both in college and graduate education by providing me with a foundation of education that was easy to build upon. At the time, advanced placement in college courses was not a common occurrence as it is today, but in many ways my freshman year in college was a repeat of my senior year in high school.

This idea may not have been a bad idea but it sure was culture shock for us. One of the initial ideas of the gifted program was that our education would put us in a position to have completed the first year of college in high school. The fact of the matter is that many did that but because of poor advising in high school most of us did not receive any advanced placement in college. Robin said, “I wish we had had more college credit available, so we could have saved money and not repeat materials in freshman year of college.” Since most of us were first-generation college students we were not even aware that advanced placement was available nor were our parents.

Emerging Theme #7: Lifetime Well-Being. Despite issues in all of our lives, everyone interviewed for this research feels very good about where they are in life. Carla stated,

I am truly happy and fulfilled. I did not have the business career that I perhaps once expected that I would have but I took my job as wife and mother very seriously and did it to the best of my ability. I was fortunate enough to be able to be a stay-at-home mom, which our children have repeatedly said they appreciated very much.

The few who rated their lives somewhat lower did so because of some health issues not because of disappointments in the way they lived their lives. They spoke highly about the gifted program and its impact on their lives. They all have a positive outlook on life, their families and the things they do. Debra shared,

The lifelong effect is that I have always felt *special* and have always had the self-confidence to believe that I could do anything I wanted to do. I'm also been very aware of my enjoyment of learning, and intellectual curiosity, a competitive spirit, and a desire to do my best it has never left me. On the other hand, since I have not achieved a high degree of education (two years of college) or success in the business/career world, I feel like an underachiever.

Their economic situations may not be as good as they had hoped and some have experienced some issues in their personal lives but all seem to be very happy and content.

Dana expressed it this way:

Actually I have been thinking about that a lot lately and I don't see success in the way a lot of people see it. Working for "Head Start," I make about \$8,000 a year, I live very modestly, I live a simple life and that is exactly how I want to live and that to me is success.

Summary of Questionnaire Responses

In addition to the interview questions, a questionnaire was sent to each participant, completed, and returned before the interviews. There were 17 questions (some with multiple parts) on the questionnaire (Appendix B). Most of the questions dealt with demographic information such as what elementary schools they attended, the teachers who had the most impact, and their extracurricular activities. The questionnaire also asked questions such as where they attended college, their major, and the education level of their children. However the most interesting data from the questionnaire was aggregate responses to questionnaire questions 1, 2, 7, and 12: Question 1 - What is your level of education, Question 2 – What degrees do you hold, Question 7 – What was your parent’s level of education, and Question 12 - Did the gifted label have a psychological impact on you? How?

The level of education of the participants (Appendix E) is exceptional for the time. In the late 60s only about 52% of high school graduates attended college let alone graduate. Only one of the 33 participants did not attend college at all and almost 90% of the participants not only attended college, they completed at least a two-year degree program. This is a significant figure by itself but considering the education level of their parents it is even more impressive.

The parent’s level of education was a reflection of the times. Of the 33 mothers (Appendix F) of the participants, 21 were high school graduates, four had some college, two had bachelor degrees, and one had a master’s degree while four only completed grade school and one was listed as unknown level of education. Of the 33 fathers (Appendix G), one was a lawyer, one had a master’s degree, one had a bachelor’s degree,

and five had some college. There were 14 high school graduates, eight completed grade school, one finished fifth grade, and two were listed as *unknown* level of education.

These figures reflected the blue-collar area the participants lived in and was not unusual for the post World War II era.

The last interesting questionnaire data are responses to the Question 12, Did the gifted label have a psychological impact on you? How? The response choices were positive, negative, no impact or a combination of positive/negative reactions (Appendix H). Seven of the participants indicated on the questionnaire that the gifted label had no psychological impact on them. This seemed to be in contrast to the responses to Interview Question 12 – What was the lifelong effect of the gifted program? To this question, all participants affirmed there was a lifelong effect of the program on their lives. Ten responded that the effect was positive such as, “fostered confidence, creativity,” “more confident of my abilities,” and “gave me validation to do anything.” While eight responded negatively, half of the negative responses were concerned with being “socially isolated” or being teased and being separated from old friends. The other negative responses had to do with feeling of not “matching up” to others in the program and the presence of “unrealistic goals for me.” There were also eight who felt there were positive and negative responses to the question of impact. One participant stated the program “gave me self-confidence, but I feel I am an underachiever” while another said “internally proud of it and confident, outwardly would not tell anyone.”

The question of the psychological impact of being labeled gifted on their lives from the questionnaire was answered prior to the interview process and the responses seemed to be different than the responses to the interview questions. Almost all of the

participants replied very favorably to the program and its effect on their lives during the interviews while the question of psychological impact of being labeled gifted on the questionnaire did not reflect that same response. Perhaps the face-to-face interview caused them to reflect and think more deeply about it than the initial questionnaire, triggering other memories or perspectives and putting a different light on their experience.

Beyond the Interview: My Own Narrative of the Experience

I was lucky growing up, I had a stay at home mom and hard-working dad. We lived in a middle-class neighborhood in the south side of St. Louis. I was the oldest of six children and the only one to participate in the gifted program. The fact that I was accepted into the gifted program was somewhat of a surprise to everyone. I was not very motivated student even when I was younger. My grades were just so-so; I would just do enough to get by. Looking back I think it may have had something to do with the fact that I was bored quite a bit. I never learned very good study habits because I did not have to study in those lower grades. I also think I was very immature both physically and socially. When I was given the opportunity to go into the gifted class, I really do not think I understood it at the time. I was told I was smart, which I immediately took as not having to work very hard to get by, so I did not. I did learn though; I learned a lot but I should have learned more. I never pushed myself to excel. This lack of effort continued with me into high school. I had no excuse; I had the God-given talent and support at home to be a successful student but I just did not care--I just squeaked by. When it came time to graduate from high school the expectation for me was to go to college, which I did reluctantly. I worked outside of school during that time. I started work at 1:00 a.m.

Monday through Friday and worked until around 5:00 a.m. This may have added to my lack of success in college but I do not think so. I just do not think I wanted to be in college. After being removed from the roster at the university, I attended the local community college and much to no one's surprise a year later I was asked to leave there as well. At that point my father, totally disgusted with his oldest son (me), asked a psychologist at the community college what was wrong with his son. The psychologist proceeded to run a battery of tests on me to find out if maybe they made a mistake back in fourth grade. After taking another IQ test, where I scored five points higher than I did on the original IQ test, the psychologist then gave me an aptitude test. Those results came back and on the top of the paperwork was the word "all." He told my dad that I could do anything that I wanted to if I put my mind to it. He then gave me another test; I called it a preference test, to determine my interests. It showed a wide variety of interests in many fields, which did not help at all. At that point the psychologists looked at my dad and said I guess the only thing I can say is I think he's bored. I could have told him that.

During this time, the spring of 1969, I became eligible for the draft and was fortunate enough to enlist in the National Guard. The military served me well; I grew up. After active duty I got a job and started a new segment of my life. I eventually met my wife and we started a family and for many years I bounced from one job to another never finding a good fit. I went back to school in the early 1980s and got an associate degree in data processing. But of course I never was a programmer. I had a history of those kinds of experiences. But in 1999 two things happened that affected the rest of my life. First my dad passed away. My dad was a brilliant man, a graduate of Iowa State as a civil

engineer and he loved learning. I think he would have been a professional student if he had his choice. But he was always disappointed that his oldest son, the gifted one, never managed to finish college. So right after my dad passed away I told my wife I was going to go back to school because that is what he always wanted me to do. So in 1999, at age 50, I started back to school. I completed my bachelor's degree, earned an MBA and an M.A., and with the completion of a doctoral degree I will hopefully finally meet those expectations my dad had for me.

Summary

The foundation for this research was the individual interviews including my own. The thoughts and reminiscences of the participants provided the context for this study. The findings were enhanced by the richness of the personal experiences that were shared. As the interview transcripts were open-coded, seven themes emerged—expectations, social, label, spiritual/religious, impact, lack of high school support, and lifetime well being. The findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the current perceptions of a group of adults who were enrolled in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools in the fall of 1959 or spring of 1960. Few studies have explored the lifetime experiences of adults who were labeled gifted as a child. Participants in this study attended a gifted program that began during the time of the Cold War and was taken to another level because of the launching of Sputnik by the USSR. I was one of the participants and the others were my classmates.

The participants in the study were a portion of the population of 62 selected from a pool of 62 potential subjects who were identified as being part of the gifted program the St. Louis Public Schools during the late 1950s and 1960s. A total of 33 accepted my invitation to participate in the study. Some of the participants did not remain in the program from fifth grade through high school. All of the participants began the program in fifth grade and all graduated from the same high school in 1967. Questions asked pertained to their experiences, whether positive or negative, while in the program. They were also asked about perceived long-term effects of the program on their lives, and the impact on their lives and their relationships with others.

The students selected for the gifted program were given the opportunity to leave the traditional classroom and participate on a full-time basis in the gifted program of the St. Louis Public Schools. The elementary school program began in the fifth grade and continued through eighth grade. The gifted program in high school was a tracking program and was a very different experience for the gifted students. The gifted students

suddenly found themselves in classes with older, perhaps less motivated students who occasionally caused problems for them.

Aligning the Interview Question Responses to the Literature

The participants in this study were asked 13 questions examining their experiences in the gifted program and relationship issues that may have occurred because of their involvement in the program. In this chapter, I discuss the links between 12 interview question responses discussed in sequential order and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The responses to question #13 are represented as a table (Appendix I) at the end of the chapter. Responses are written in narrative form and summarized from all participants.

What did it mean to you to be labeled gifted? When asked what it meant to be labeled gifted the participants had a wide variety of responses. Some of the participants felt that when they were labeled *gifted* the expectations of their performance were immediately raised. There were also some negative responses to this question. Some felt that by being put in a separate classroom they were isolated from the other students in the school and it made them feel different from other students. Those participants who had to go to another school, out of their neighborhood, also felt the segregation from their friends in the old neighborhood most acutely. Many of them also felt some of the teasing they endured because they were smart was exacerbated by the separation at school and losing the neighborhood connection. Despite these things, the participants felt that the change to another school increased their self-confidence, made them feel special, offered them more opportunities, and built their self-esteem. Others felt that it was an honor to be labeled as gifted and truly enjoyed the experience. From an academic point of view

they realized they needed to continue to get good test grades even though they were taking advanced classes. A couple of the unique responses were that being labeled gifted was no big deal because they were not the first gifted child in their family. And one participant commented, rather sarcastically, being labeled gifted was better than the alternative of being in the regular classes. These responses might be examples of self-fulfilling prophecies, “An outcome of labeling might be the self-fulfilling prophecy” (Rist, 1977, p. 77) because “one’s self-expectations influence one’s subsequent behavior” (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962, p. 179).

While most of the participants discussed their enjoyment of the program, the ones that had to leave their neighborhood to go to another school disliked the travel and the fact that when they went home the neighborhood children treated them differently. But overall the experience was good for them and the difficulty of travel, the separation from neighborhood friends and the segregated classroom setting was advantages and worth it to be part of the program. The participants agreed with the findings of Freeman and Jensen (1999), who argued that isolation from non-gifted children could be advantageous for gifted children and with Pederson, Duncan, and Canady (2012), who found that “being in the homogeneously high-ability context of the school for gifted children their elementary school years was life altering” (p. 82).

What effect did being gifted have on your relationships with your siblings?

Parents? Extended family? Other students? When asked what effects being labeled gifted had on their relationships, many of the students stated that their parents responded in a very positive way and expressed great pride that their children were part of the gifted program. However, some stressed the necessity for their children to make the most of

what they were given through this program. Another response from parents was that they then had higher expectations for their children. Some parents were not surprised by the fact their children made the gifted program because another sibling was already in the program. But many of the parents knew very little about the program and were surprised when told they had a gifted child.

The positive reaction by parents was in contrast to many negative reactions by siblings. Some of the siblings were extremely jealous that they were not part of the program. In many cases it made the siblings feel inferior which in turn caused friction in the family. The reaction by the extended family seemed to be neutral.

Most of the social and emotional problems that these students encountered were with other students and some adults, who expected them to be more mature for their age and parents needed to deal with the stress these issues brought to light. According to Ross, "the discrepancy between the intellectual and social-emotional development of the gifted often creates stress for the child and parent alike" (p. 160). These other students included students not in the gifted program who attended the new school and those that lived in the old neighborhood and attended the original grade school. The friends that they had made in the old neighborhood were upset because they would be separated from their friends and the gifted students were troubled by the same feelings. Even though they lived in the same neighborhood they spent much of the day away and eventually lost touch with many of those childhood friends; although, some of those relationships were rekindled later when they were all funneled into the same high school.

The other problem came from the students not in the gifted program at the new school and it came in the form of teasing and animosity toward the gifted students. Some

of this was perceived as jealousy because of the extracurricular activities that were part of the gifted program.

Did you experience any difficulties as a gifted child? What were they? The interviewees were not only gifted, they also participated in a gifted program and therefore, their responses seemed to be about difficulties not only with being gifted, but also with being in the gifted program. Although some of the students did not perceive any difficulties being in this gifted program, some described difficulties associated with being gifted and participating in a gifted program: more difficult and time consuming school work; teasing; logistics of traveling to a school outside their neighborhood; and social unpreparedness for high school. Some felt overshadowed because they were shy and quieter than some of the other students. Swiatek (2001) believed that gifted children experience social benefits from ability grouping, as they are more likely to fit in with other gifted students than with average or below-average students. As Marcia stated “We appreciated each other’s camaraderie, going through the same experiences and having to get all the homework done.”

More homework, lack of sleep, high expectations and harder classes were also common difficulties reported, which put pressure on the students. Cloud noted in 2007 that there are approximately the same numbers of school-age children at both the high and low ends of the spectrum and those at the higher end are expected to be able to succeed on their own. Luke felt that “there were high expectations. Sometimes there was a perception that if someone was gifted they were more self-motivated to be successful.”

Teasing on the playground is not an unusual occurrence, however, the gifted program was a new opportunity to tease or in some cases bully students. The segregated nature of the program made the gifted students easy targets. Patrick's perception was "As it exists today, bullying due to differences, occurred all the time: being in fights or threatened by fights was common." Beyond acknowledgement of this finding, Kearney (1993) compared the teasing of gifted children to racial or ethnic slurs or the teasing of a child with a disability and argued that it is unacceptable and can inhibit intellectual growth. Other issues creating difficulties that were revealed in the interviews were the extra travel time to a different school out of their neighborhood; the stress of the extra homework that reduced time for extracurricular activities, especially sports in the old neighborhood; and, the lack of social preparation. St. Louis Public Schools Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education Edward H. Beumer noted in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (Sixth graders eligible, public schools to conduct special classes for gifted. 1955) that in order to minimize social isolation, the gifted students were expected to take part in normal school activities, mingle with other students outside their classes, and only be differentiated in their own classrooms. The purpose of the strategy was to allow all students opportunities to know each other and build relationships outside the classroom. Despite these measures, several students felt they lacked social skills and were not prepared to go to high school where they were mixed with students not recognized as gifted.

Tell me about your experience with the gifted program during elementary school. Some of the students disliked having to switch schools, because taking public transportation (in some cases alone) was inconvenient and unpleasant. But most had a

very positive experience and expressed comments such as, it was great, I really enjoyed it, and I thought of it as a great opportunity. Many expressed appreciation for the opportunity because they felt that it was fun, exciting, and life-changing. Most appreciated the small classes, the challenging course work, and the teachers. In keeping with this finding, Thomas (1980), found that five years after participating in an academic talent search program, gifted children had many of the same positive feelings as the participants in this research. They viewed the program very favorably and felt it improved their self-esteem, though disruptive at the time.

One of the frequently mentioned positive comments of the interviewees was the enrichment part of the program in grade school. They found the coursework challenging and really appreciated the additional enrichment that was provided. This finding is supported by Swiatek (2001), who believed that without opportunities for enhanced instruction, gifted students may become bored with the regular curriculum and experience academic problems. Examples of the enrichment are as follows: field trips to the symphony, Saturday morning classes at Washington University, learning from an art teacher from the St. Louis Art Museum who came to the gifted classes, and learning French in fifth through eighth grades. In alignment with this program description, Thomas (1980) described enrichment programs as designed to give gifted students who are in traditional classroom settings supplemental material to challenge them.

Did the format of the program (pullout or segregated program in elementary school) meet your needs? Most of the students liked the program because it was challenging. The students felt it met their needs academically, was innovative, and helped them be successful in grade school. Kimbrough (1956) may have agreed that the

purpose of gifted programs is to bring to life and put to work an innate intelligence, as he wrote the following:

It's a matter of a broadened and especially stimulating course of study, which will help the youngsters make the most of their abilities. If we merely held up the normal level as the standard for all, we would be training for mediocrity. (para. 21)

The classes were accelerated in grade school. The students completed the coursework for fifth and sixth grade in one academic year and were then one year ahead academically. This finding is supported by the research of Kulik (1992), who found that students in accelerated classes can out pace other same aged and IQ students, from non-accelerated classes, on achievement tests by one year.

Some of the students felt that the program lacked emotional support, social training, and in high school it lacked counseling and advising especially when it came to the future and college decisions. Even though many of the students felt that the program was fun, challenging, and socially inclusive (being around other students who had a similar work ethic), these students also felt ill prepared for high school because of the segregated nature of the elementary program. In light of this, Baker et al. (1998) recognized that being smart is usually a plus in elementary school but warned how peer pressure especially in middle and high school can negatively influence students and must not be ignored.

Some of the students appreciated the mixed gym classes because it gave them an opportunity to meet, bond, and participate with other students. The only other time mixing was possible was during recess in grade school, which sometimes was a challenge

because of the teasing. Last, interviewees raised a concern that there was a lack of racial diversity in the program. In reality, the city of St. Louis was very segregated city at the time and the number of minorities in the area was small so the schools only mirrored the local community as a whole.

What is your opinion of the teachers in the gifted program (elementary school)? Most of the students felt their teachers were above average or excellent. The teachers seemed to always be there to challenge the students and some even had huge positive impacts on their students' lives. Robin felt that her eighth grade teacher: "had a huge impact on my life in eighth grade. I later had him for two classes in graduate school. He was just as impactful then." Research literature seems to contradict this finding that teachers in gifted programs at that time in history were perceived by the students to be well prepared. According to French (1959), most of the (gifted) training was left to the individual school districts because universities only offered workshops or summer sessions with titles such as "Education of Gifted Children" or "Methods and Materials for the Gifted." Universities were slow to develop courses to meet the need for gifted educators.

Students felt that some of the teachers were kinder than others; in fact one student felt that a teacher actually humiliated him: "Now, my last teacher, eighth grade, was different. She taught coercively. She humiliated on a regular basis and drilled in an "elitist" mentality because of our being gifted."

A couple students felt that the teachers were scary although most of them felt that they made the classes more interesting, helped them grow and made the transition from elementary to high school easy. The students felt that most of the teachers had high

standards, were inspiring and in some cases even memorable. Perhaps teachers in gifted programs during that time, though academically ill prepared in gifted education, enjoyed the challenge of their new job and simply adapted what they already knew about the teaching and learning of children to this new situation. Perhaps they, too, benefited from being labeled as a gifted teacher and sought to self-fulfill the prophecy.

What impact did going to another school have on your family? On you?

This question was probably the one that had the most definitive responses. The students clearly talked about three negative aspects of attending another school: primarily transportation, difficulties for their parents, and the impact on them. When asked the first part of the question the impact of going to another school on their families, the negative responses were almost all about transportation and the cost sometimes associated with it (some children had to ride a city bus). The difficulty for the parents, primarily the mothers, was trying to be in two places at the same time. Many of the families found themselves with children in two different elementary schools and trying to be supportive was a challenge. For the students themselves the challenging curriculum, although expected, was a surprise to some but the biggest impact on them was social. Leaving neighborhood friends behind, forming new relationships and the segregated nature of the program all seemed to be problematic for many of them.

What were the advantages of the program? When asked this question, the students all referred to the elementary school experience, as opposed to the high school experience. The elementary school experience was highly regarded by the students. Quite a few of the students also responded specifically about the additional opportunities to learn, the wide variety of experiences, and the innovative approaches to education that

made them feel as though they were older and more mature. Kulik (1992) supported this finding with his argument that programs using enrichment and acceleration show the greatest positive effects and participants in those programs outperform their peers by almost one year on a grade equivalent scale, a clear advantage even though not acknowledged by the students who were interviewed. The students also spoke positively about their different curriculum and the teachers' ability to have a fast paced classroom knowing that the students would be able to keep up. In alignment with this finding, Robinson (as cited by Jancich, 2004) further warned that without a challenging curriculum, gifted students may become bored, earn lower grades, and inattentive in class, which may lead to misdiagnoses of hyperactivity or even attention deficit disorder. Even though the expectations were higher for the students many of them, they saw the advantages of the program as they reflected back on it.

The students, for the most part, were recognized as being special, which gave many of them a feeling of self-confidence and a solid foundation for learning. They also felt that the teachers were better than non-gifted teachers and that they provided more hands-on and intense study opportunities in ways such as field trips to gain a better understanding of the subject matter and to learn more deeply and in different ways outside the classroom. The challenges of this course work prepared most of them to have good study habits, which made high school and even college a little easier. Last, the interviewees mentioned the small class size as particularly advantageous and there was less frustration from all the students because they were not as bored. Students found it easy to discuss the program's advantages.

What were the disadvantages? The most prevalent response was separation from their neighborhood. Almost all of the students who had to change schools felt that it caused many issues for themselves and their families. As discussed earlier, the separation from old friends and the difficulties of transportation were major concerns for many of the students. The students also felt remoteness from old friends and a disconnection with the neighborhoods where they still lived.

Separation was also an issue for the students who did not have to switch schools, just classrooms. Even though they were not separated from old friends because they did not have to move to another school, they were still separated, if only by being down the hall. Besides the disconnection, some of the students felt that the segregation of the program really held back their understanding of the students not chosen for the gifted program. Cloud (2007) argued that higher IQ children have just as many problems interacting with average IQ children and as do children with lower IQs. Many of the students felt emotionally unprepared when they went to high school due to the somewhat isolated nature of the gifted program.

Tell me about your experience with the gifted program in high school? In contrast to the elementary school gifted program, most of the students did not have many good things to say about their high school experience with the program. The high school experience was a tracking program and after having a great experience in the gifted program during elementary school, the high school experience was a huge disappointment. The adjustment to having some classes with older students was a challenge both socially and academically. Socially they were often not accepted well and academically they were not challenged. The gifted students were perceived as being too

smart and did not fit in well with some of the other high school students. Cross (2002) supported this finding: “Being too smart” can be perceived as a problem, and “a large portion of American students with gifts and talents have developed social coping strategies that use up time, energy, limit their opportunities, cause bad decisions to be made, retard their learning, and threaten their lives” (para. 9). Another problem in some classes with non-gifted students was that the course work was not preparing the students for college work. Although Cross (2002) debunked the idea that the gifted do not have to study or work hard in school, I did not have to work hard in high school to get good grades and therefore was not prepared for the rigors of college work.

Probably the biggest issue in high school was the lack of good counseling. Most of the students in the program were going to be the first of their family to attend college. The students were given very little guidance about scholarships, Advanced Placement credits and were in some cases misinformed about college opportunities.

Wyant (1962) found the expectation to be that by the time gifted students got out of high school they would be a year ahead of other pupils and would have the equivalent of about one year of college work, which could allow them to earn their college degrees in three years rather than four. This idea obviously did not come to fruition for many of the students. The lack of follow through in high school was one of the biggest disappointments among the students.

What is your opinion on tracking programs in the public schools? Some of the respondents were very adamant in their negative feelings about tracking programs in the public schools for a variety of reasons. However for every negative response there were two or three in favor of tracking systems in the public schools despite the

inconsistent use of these classes in their own high school experience. This finding is in keeping with Fischer (2004) who argued that tracking or ability grouping at the secondary level is not a black or white issue, but that lower ability students seem to do better in mixed-ability class settings than in low-ability class settings. However, the reverse seems to be the case for the high-ability students, who “stagnate in the heterogeneously mixed classes” (Fischer, 2004, p. 224), but thrive in classes with students of equal ability.

Other responses to tracking varied. One respondent was concerned about them being done correctly, while another saw pros and cons to tracking programs in high school and still another would want to ensure emotional support was provided. One respondent feared labeling at any level is an issue because all children develop in different ways and a label of any kind may mark a child in a negative as well as a positive way. Some felt that it should be done by subject matter while others were not sure what would be the best method. Another felt that labeling may have a bigger impact on those in the lower levels of a tracking program because they may have a feeling of hopelessness or of despair because of the label. The respondents’ mixed feelings about labeling are supported by Rist’s (1977) uncertainty about labeling:

If the labeling perspective can be shown to be a legitimate framework from which to analyze social processes influencing the educational experience and the contributions of such processes to success or failure in school, there would then be a viable interactionists’ perspective to counter both biological and determinists’ theories of educational outcomes. (p. 71)

To summarize, the majority of respondents were in favor of some type of tracking. The consensus was that the educational system should meet the needs (including emotional) of all students.

What was the life-long effect of the gifted program? The lifelong effect of this gifted program of the respondents was varied. Some of the respondents felt as though they could never be good enough to meet expectations. But most of them felt as though it gave them a solid base for education in their lives, a feeling of self-confidence, and an inner peace and contentment with their lives. In keeping with this finding, Lee and Waters (2003) stated that life's stressors can be dealt with much more easily if a strong feeling of spiritual well-being is part of one's life. Some respondents described a gain in logical thinking skills that made them feel more confident and gave them a great love of learning. Others expressed a resulting sense of independence and a very special feeling about themselves. Neihart's (1999) research on the impact of giftedness on mental health may provide insight into these findings. He found that in comparison to the general public the gifted have a normal or even better than normal capability of adjustment. A greater than average ability to adapt would not be a likely insight among the respondents, but may give gifted persons in general a Darwinian edge in life. And, further, based on Neihart's study, perhaps being gifted had a greater life-long effect on them than being in a gifted education program.

How would you rate your life on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the most successful and why? Over 90% rated their lives as an 8 or above. The other 10% rated their lives as a 7 due to some health issues (Appendix I). Despite some difficulties and detours, all felt successful and happy with their lives. The responses to this interview

question gives credence to and supports participant responses to the questionnaire

Question 12 - Did the gifted label have a psychological impact on you?

Aligning the Emerging Themes to the Literature Review

Seven themes emerged for the interview data analysis—expectations, social, label, spiritual/religious, impact, lack of high school support, and lifetime well-being.

The following section aligns the themes with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

Emerging Theme #1: Expectations. The first theme was one of expectations. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 was enacted to “strengthen our American system of education so that it can meet broad and increasing demands imposed upon it by considerations of basic national security” (Lips & McNeill, 2009, p. 15). Even though we were told about the importance of the program, the magnitude was not obvious to us as children, but we did know there were greater pressures on us to be successful. But, as we reflected back on our experience in the gifted program later in life and especially during this study, we began to comprehend the significance of the gifted program of which we were a part, and we were better able to comprehend what was expected of us because the American public felt “that the nation’s scientific leadership, perhaps even survival, depended upon changing its educational institutions” (Clowse, 1981, p. 15). As a whole, we all felt the weight of the nation’s expectations on us.

Emerging Theme #2: Social. Many of the social issues that arose were because of the segregated nature of the gifted program. Many students had to leave their neighborhood school to attend classes in a different school. Even though some of us were lucky enough to remain in the same school, we were still segregated from the other students in the school. When first developed, the gifted program of the St. Louis Public

Schools gave some thought to the social aspects of the segregation of the gifted students. From an article in the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* two views were expressed: “We are going to keep in the front of their [the gifted students] minds the point that by virtue of their advanced abilities and better opportunities, they owe a lot to their fellows [classmates] who are not endowed as well” (Sixth Graders Are Eligible, 1955, para. 11) and the students were “expected to take part in normal school activities, mingle with other students normally, and only be differentiated in their own classroom. This strategy was implemented “in hopes of avoiding students being called names or being teased” (para. 12). In truth, these strategies did not alleviate the social problems and isolation we experienced. Despite the good intentions of the program designers, the segregated nature of the program actually exacerbated many of the issues it hoped to avoid.

Emerging Theme #3: Label. The gifted label was embraced by some of the gifted program participants and downplayed by others. Although most embrace their giftedness today, many did not at the time. Downplaying the gifted label was a desperate attempt by some to fit in with former classmates and friends. In support of the mixed response to labeling, Freeman and Jensen (1999) found that sometimes, gifted children “resent their own giftedness,” concluding that being gifted is the very thing that prevents them from fitting in with their peers (para. 4). Aronson and Carlsmith’s idea, “one’s self-expectations influence one’s subsequent behavior” (1962, p. 179), may support those who embraced the gifted label and the expectations that came with it. Further support of labeling as a theme can be found in Rist’s (1977) research findings that suggest, “an outcome of labeling might be the self-fulfilling prophesy (p. 77).

Emerging Theme #4: Spiritual/Religious. The spiritual or religious theme was prevalent among the participants during the interviews. In keeping with this theme, Chauvin (2000) stated that because of their curiosity and intellect, gifted individuals commonly “explore spiritual and existential issues from an early age” (p. 135). Although acquired at different stages in their lives, most of the participants had a great sense of spirituality and/or a strong religious faith. Further support for this theme can be found in Cohen (2002):

Spirituality may be related to satisfaction with life in that spiritual people may be able adequately to explain events, feel close to God, see beauty in the world, find comfort in their religious beliefs, and feel their lives have purpose to name a few possibilities. (p. 288)

Emerging Theme #5: Impact. The impact on the participants manifested itself in many ways. The impact of the educational expectations, the “gifted” label, the change in family dynamics, and the financial and logistical issues that arose were great. Specifically, the financial and logistical problems were caused by the lack of school-sponsored transportation for the students to attend the gifted program at another school. This thought process might also be an example of a self-fulfilling prophesy, “An outcome of labeling might be the self-fulfilling prophesy” (Rist, 1977, p. 77) because “one’s self-expectations influence one’s subsequent behavior” (Aronson & Carlsmith, 1962, p. 179). A quote in an article by Wyant in a 1962 edition of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* supports the financial and logistical issues as an impact: “parents must give their consent, to have the children travel out of their own neighborhoods at family

expense” (para. 22). Clearly the impact was on the families as a whole, not just on the gifted student.

Emerging Theme #6: Lack of High School Support. Lack of support in high school was expressed by most of the participants. Many of us were socially and emotionally unprepared for high school. The isolation of grade school no longer existed and being in classes with much older students was, at best, difficult at times. But the lack of college guidance support was the most mentioned disappointment of many of the respondents. When we became part of the program in 1959-60 the program was in its third year and was well established and in a 1962 article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Wyant (1962) stated,

The net of it is that they are a good year ahead of other pupils by the time they get into high school, and when they leave they have had the equivalent of about one year of college work. (para. 27)

In the same article, Ware (as cited in Wyant, 1962) stated

They very likely will get their college degrees in three years instead of four. We hope of course that they are so in love with learning they will stay the fourth year and go on with graduate work. We have set up machinery to follow them through college, and see how they do. (para. 28)

Five years later this part of the plan had fallen apart. Academically we were ready for college but we did not get guidance about Advanced Placement credits, career choices or scholarship opportunities.

Emerging Theme #7: Lifetime Well-Being. Almost all of the participants had a distinct feeling of well-being in their lives at the time of the interviews after a lifetime of

being labeled gifted. They attributed much of it to the foundation that was set for them by the gifted program they participated in. They also felt that the positive attitude, reinforcement and sense of accomplishment they felt during that time of their lives gave them a great head start. Merton's (1948) self-fulfilling prophesy research supports this theme. Although Merton's research showed that negative labeling leads to self-fulfilling negative outcomes, I found the opposite to be true with this group--that positive labeling led to self-fulfilling positive outcomes. These participants were given the expectation of success at the age of 10, which was reinforced many times in their young lives.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) wondered if disadvantaged students would do better in class if teachers expected more of them. Their results showed self-fulfilling prophesy could be established through the influence of positive beliefs.

Self-enhancement theory contends that people tend to naturally view themselves positively (Jussim, Yen, & Aiello, 1995) which seems to support the positive influence of self-fulfilling prophesies. Individuals seem to attend more to positive messages than negative ones; therefore, positive messages or beliefs may create more self-fulfilling prophecy results than negative ones (Madon et al., 2011, p. 589).

Current Status of Study Participants

Many of the participants are retired or soon will be. Still others are continuing to work and earn a living. Most live full lives and are very happy. There have regrets and some have made some poor decisions. But his research project gave each one of them, including myself, an opportunity to not only think about the experience we all shared 50 years ago but to reflect on the effect of that experience on our lives. That effect, although different for each one of us, was very good for most of us. We got something out of it.

To paraphrase from “Camelot” there once was a place of excitement, promise, and outstanding academic opportunities called The St. Louis Public Schools Gifted Program.

Personal Reflection

When I started this process I was just going to interview my former classmates for my dissertation, but it soon turned into much more. It became an opportunity to reconnect, not only for me, but also for the participants that I was interviewing. From the very first interview I realized that this was much more than just an interview for my research. It was an opportunity to reflect on my own experience as well. I was also surprised to see how much Dana (the first interviewee) was enjoying the experience. It was much more than we both anticipated. I had not seen Dana or talked to her since 1967 and the conversation started off as if we had never been separated. As the interview progressed it became more of a conversation between friends than an interview. Our recollections of events did not always agree but the opportunity to talk through it and to bring some clarity to the memories was great even if some of the facts as we remembered them were not completely clear. Throughout all of the interviews, “facts” were told as we believed they happened and according to Rosenwald (1992), “it is enough to note that they believe they are doing so. This belief is at the base of their struggles to tell their stories correctly” (p. 271).

Although I became better as an interviewer as time went by, my enthusiasm did not diminish nor did the enthusiasm of my subjects. We opened up to each other, reminisced about old times, and talked about friends who had passed away. We lost track of time. We also talked about good times and bad, the experiences we shared and our thoughts about the program. Although each interview was different I realized that there

were some similarities. I realized that the negatives about the program and that their impact lessened with time and maturity. The issues we faced as adolescence in the gifted program which seemed so overwhelming at the time, now seem to be nothing more than just a hiccup in our lives. It also became quite apparent that this program left an impact on all of us. For many of us the impact really was not felt until later in life. In grade school we were having fun and were experiencing new things. In high school the experience was not as good but we still survived and we struggled with the same social issues as other adolescents. Despite these things our memories are mostly fond ones. Our collective reflections also brought to light the simple fact that as we grew older and looked back at our lives we realized the great opportunity that was afforded us. Some of us took advantage of it and some did not but we all had benefited from the experience in some way. But I think the opportunity to reflect on our lives had another effect on all of us. This was a unique group; we had a shared experience during an impressionable time of our life and had the opportunity to reflect on it. The reflection is part of the beauty of this narrative research where the interpretation is derived from “access to the facts provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation” (Habermas, as cited in Mezirow, 1991, p. 5).

We had the opportunity to gather in St. Louis a couple of different times to acquaint us with each other. With my wife’s help, I arranged two reunions and invited all of the participants and their spouses (or guests) to attend as a natural next step in this endeavor. Some attended both reunions, some attended one, and some were unable to attend either. Of the 33 participants, over 20 attended one or both of the gatherings. Despite the fact that the gifted program was the common thread that brought us all

together the program itself was not mentioned to any great degree. This was a time to socialize and to reunite with old friends. The conversations were about catching up on each other's lives, getting updates on those who were not able to join us and wondering about the ones we have lost track of. It was amazing. We were a group again. Older, yes—wiser, probably, but definitely more appreciative of that time long ago when we were young and impressionable and had our whole life ahead of us.

Many people have kept in touch with each other since the interviews and reunions, continue to share experiences, and continue to build on the rekindled friendships that happened because of this endeavor. The participants reflected on how the program helped them, how it set some standards for them, and in some cases frustrated them, but overall helped them at various times through the rest of their lives. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) provided insight into the results of the interview process and subsequent reunions and lend support to the outcome: “from the analysis of the responses subjective interpretations can be made” (p. 4). Additionally, the impact of the reflective interviews gave all of us an opportunity to put that time of our lives in perspective and appreciate the opportunity that was afforded us. In keeping with this outcome, Riesman (1993) said, “the purpose [of reflection] is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (p. 2).

The success of the gifted program on the participants interviewed, may best be measured by their positive view of life, their contentment and the positive view of the gifted program that brought us together many years ago.

Experience of Reflection

There was a side story or an unexpected outcome that emerged through the interview process. The bond between the participants that was forged through shared experiences and the particular situation we shared over 50 years ago was rekindled. Not only was it rekindled, it continues to be important in our lives today. Long past the educational advantages we had and the issues we faced, the gifted program we participated in has become a sense of pride and continues to affect us individually and as a group. Some of this may have been caused by our participation in this research. The reflective process of the interview questions may have given the participants the opportunity to take a look at their lives differently. When put in the context of the effect of the gifted program on our lives as opposed to where we are in our lives today the interview process gave us an opportunity to view our lives from a different perspective. Our lives were influenced by the gifted label, the expectations put on us, the confidence that we could do anything we wanted to do, the ability to think for ourselves and set standards for each of us whether we realized it at the time or not.

Answering the Research Question

The research question was, How did the St. Louis Public Schools gifted program contribute to the lived experience of the students who started in the program in 1959 and 1960? As each interview was added to this research, it was evident that the subject of the interviews was of great interest to the participants. Reflecting on the past 50 years brought buried memories to life and a group of former classmates together, if not physically, emotionally. The passing of years brought focus and a new understanding of the opportunities afforded us as well as the difficulties we faced. Looking back on this

shared experience, the participants all without exception felt that they got something positive out of their participation in this program whether they took full advantage of it or not. When the interview process was completed, five ways surfaced to describe how the program contributed to the lived experience of the students in this study—set expectations for life, set a pattern for their lives, spirituality in their life, life satisfaction, and higher than normal percentage of college graduates. A discussion of each follows.

Set expectations for life. Many of them go so far as to say that it had a large impact and set a pattern for their lives. While some did not realize the impact until sometime later in life, they still recognized the positive influence it had on them and their lives. The accelerated format, the fast pace in the classroom, and the enrichment were all positive aspects of the program.

Set a pattern for their lives. Above and beyond the academic side of the program, especially in grade school, there were the things learned that were not in the lesson plan, the ability to think independent of others, the feeling that we could accomplish more, the feeling of self-confidence, and feeling equal to any task. Even those who did not take full advantage (elementary school only) of the program benefitted from the exposure and were glad to have had the opportunity.

Aside from the program itself, giving us a structure or framework to build on each of us also benefitted, to various degrees, from being labeled gifted. The label was embraced by some, downplayed by some and almost ignored by others during that time in our lives. However, as we grew older the idea of being labeled gifted has grown on us. Our gifted experience has shaped us and has become a sense of pride for us.

Spirituality in their lives. During this process, an air of spirituality surfaced—a belief in something bigger. It brought peace and satisfaction to many and seemed to put many lives in perspective. I think the early training, the encouragement to explore, to think outside the box and think independently gave most the ability to see the big picture and pursue alternatives in their lives. However the spirituality manifested itself, in the final analysis it did become a part of the lives of many.

Life satisfaction. As a group we have also found ourselves at ease with who we are and our situation in life. There is an overall feeling of contentment in our lives despite some not having achieved all they felt they should. With this in mind, the gifted label may have had a significant impact on us. Rubington and Weinberg (1973) stated that being typed makes people become aware of the label placed on them and they subsequently act accordingly and are socially changed. Aronson and Carlsmith (1962) suggested, “one’s self-expectations influence one’s subsequent behavior” (p. 179). According to Rist (1977), “an outcome of labeling might be the self-fulfilling prophesy” (p. 77).

Self-fulfilling prophesy theory may explain the contentment with the participants of this program. Although Merton (1948) first coined the idea of self-fulfilling prophesy in reference to negative outcomes, the positive outcomes in this case seem to be the cause of the self-fulfilling prophesy of success in life. The positive self-fulfilling prophesy is also supported by Jussim, Yen, and Aiello’s (1995) self-enhancement theory which proposes that people are more apt to view themselves favorably. And as stated by Madon et al. (2011), individuals pay more attention to positive rather than negative messages, which may cause them to pay more attention to others positive ideas about them (p. 589).

All of these support and perhaps help explain the overall feeling of contentment by the participants.

Higher than normal percentage of college graduates. In a time period (1967) when the percentage of students attending college was relatively low, 82% of this group started college in 1967. And more impressive is the fact that all but one (97%) did go to college at some point in their lives and 82% graduated from college.

An unintended and maybe more important outcome was the emotional effect on the participants. Fond memories, old friends, and the chance to reminisce seemed to be enjoyable for all of us. Whether the contact was at one of the small reunions or, by phone or through social media, almost all of the participants from across the country took advantage of the opportunity to communicate and rekindle old friendships. These relationships continue at the time of this writing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Being labeled gifted has been discussed and the possible effects of labeling on self-fulfilling prophecies. If more evidence can be found to support the idea of positive labeling leading to positive self-fulfilling prophecies, many aspects of education may be affected, not just the gifted. There are parallels to this in the business community. If someone is labeled as being very capable they may be “fast-tracked” and given more training and afforded more opportunities to advance in their company. Many of our gifted students have exceptional talents in some areas and not in others, so we need to also explore pull-out gifted programs that would allow students to excel in their area of giftedness and still give them support in other areas of education with other gifted students.

I also recommend that research involving the well-being and life development of gifted students be investigated. Only considering the academic promise does a disservice to the student. The lifetime development of gifted students needs to be considered. This research found a theme of spirituality and or religion in many of the participants. This religious or spirituality may be due to their “giftedness,” their natural curiosity, or perhaps a carry-over of their upbringing in a middle class urban setting. According to Noble (2000), well-being in gifted adults can be influenced by spirituality. I believe continued efforts to seek an understanding of this finding are warranted.

Conclusion

Based on the interview results, the unique gifted program in this study had an impact on the lives of the participants interviewed. Reflection on the lived experience of being labeled gifted caused participants to sometimes view their lives more positively than before the interviews. Seven themes emerged from the interviews: (a) expectations, (b) social, (c) label, (d) spiritual/religious, (e) impact, (f) lack of high school support, and (g) lifetime well-being.

The gifted program contributed to the lived experience of the participants in several ways. Perhaps most importantly the gifted label seemed to manifest itself as a self-fulfilling prophesy that participants would lead successful, fulfilling lives. It gave the participants an expectation of success and set a pattern for their lives. For many, the ability to think for themselves and the encouragement to seek answers that the gifted program instilled in them led to a sense of spirituality in their life and a feeling of satisfaction with their lives. The participants also had a much higher than average college graduation rate for the time. An unexpected outcome was the bond that was

formed between the participants through the interview process—sharing memories of a common experience 50 years ago. Perhaps positive labeling could be beneficial to the lives of all students.

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Appendix A**Interview Questions**

1. What did it mean to you to be labeled gifted?
2. What effect did being gifted have on your relationship with your siblings? Your parents? Your family? Other students?
3. Did you experience any difficulties as a gifted child? What were they?
4. Tell me about your experience with the gifted program during elementary school.
5. Did the format of the program (pull-out or segregated program in elementary school) meet your needs?
6. What is your opinion of the teachers in the gifted program (elementary school)?
7. What impact did going to another school have on your family? On you?
8. What were the advantages of the program?
9. What were any disadvantages?
10. Tell me about your experience with the gifted program during high school.
11. What is your opinion on tracking programs in the public schools?
12. What was the lifelong effect of the gifted program?
13. How would you rate your life on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the most successful and why?

Appendix B
Questionnaire

1) What is your level of education?

High School_____ Associates_____ Bachelors_____ Masters_____ Doctorate_____

2) What degrees do you hold?_____

3) Did you attend college right after high school? _____

If not, what did you do?_____

4) Did you receive AP credit when you started college? How many?_____

5) Where did you go to college?_____

6) Describe your college experience_____

7) What was your parent's level of education? _____

8) What is your children's level of education?_____

9) Were your children in gifted programs?_____

10) Did your involvement in the gifted program influence educational decisions for your children? How? _____

11) Compare the program you were part of to that of your children if they were in a gifted program._____

12) Did the gifted label have a psychological impact on you? How?

13) What extracurricular activities were you involved with in elementary school? High school? College?

14) What teacher had the biggest impact on you in elementary school? High school?

How? _____

15) What elementary school did you attend prior to the gifted

program? _____

16) What elementary school did you attend as part of the gifted

program? _____

17) What long-term relationships have you maintained with fellow students from the

program?

Appendix C

Consent Form

Lindenwood University School of Education
209 S. Kingshighway
St. Charles, Missouri 63301
Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

“The lifetime experiences of being labeled “gifted”: case studies of students in a 1959 public school gifted program.”

Principal Investigator: Jack Beckerle, MA, MBA Telephone: 636-949-4572 E-mail: jbeckerle@lindenwood.edu

Participant _____ Contact info _____

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jack Beckerle and Dr. Cindy Vitale. The purpose of this research is to determine the meaning and impact of being in this program of students who entered the St. Louis Public School’s Gifted Program in September of 1959 and January 1960.

1. a) Your participation will involve an interview (in person or by phone) conducted by Jack Beckerle about your experience in the Gifted Program. The conversation will include personal experiences, anecdotal thoughts and lifetime experiences. These interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy. Audio and/or video recordings may be used.
b) The amount of time involved for your participation will vary but should not be more than 1-2 hours. Fifty-one former students have been identified as potential subjects.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation may contribute to knowledge about the success or failure of gifted pull-out programs and may help our society realize the importance of and the needs of our gifted students.
5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the investigator, Jack Beckerle at (636)949-4572 or his Faculty Advisor, Dr. Cindy Vitale at (636)949-4315. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) by contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at (636)949-4846.

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

Participant's Signature	Date	Participant's Printed Name
Signature of Principal Investigator	Date	John R. Beckerle Investigator Printed Name

Appendix D

Interview Request

Dear Paul,

It was great speaking with you this morning and thanks for agreeing to help out. As I said this morning, I am completing my doctorate in education and need your help with some research. As you may know the United States has fallen behind many countries educationally, especially in math and science. These other countries are taking their best and brightest, at an early age, and giving them the tools they need to excel. We, on the other hand, have cut back on or completely eliminated “gifted programs” from the curriculum in many of our public schools. In the public school districts that have gifted programs the students may only have an opportunity one day a week or a couple of hours per week to work with other gifted students and with teachers who understand the needs of these talented young people.

The purpose of my research is to determine the lived experiences of students who started the “Gifted Program” of the St. Louis Public Schools in 1959 and 1960. I want to see how we perceived the program, did we benefit from it, etc. To do this I want to speak to students, like you, who entered the St. Louis Public School gifted program in September of 1959 or January of 1960. In short, what did the program mean in your life? In doing so, I hope to show the worth of complete pull-out programs for our gifted students and also bring attention to their needs. My research question is: How did the students who started in the “Gifted Program” of the St. Louis public schools in 1959 and 1960 benefit from it? My research will include educational, personal and anecdotal information.

This is where you come in. I would like to interview you about your life experiences since being in the program. It is hard to believe we have been out of high school for over 40 years! And even harder to believe we began the “Gifted Program” almost 50 years ago! Even though it has been some time since I have spoken with you and much has changed in both of our lives I am sure we will be able to revive some memories and maybe add to the research on gifted students. I have also included a written survey and a consent form (and an extra form for you to keep) which I would appreciate you filling out and return to me.

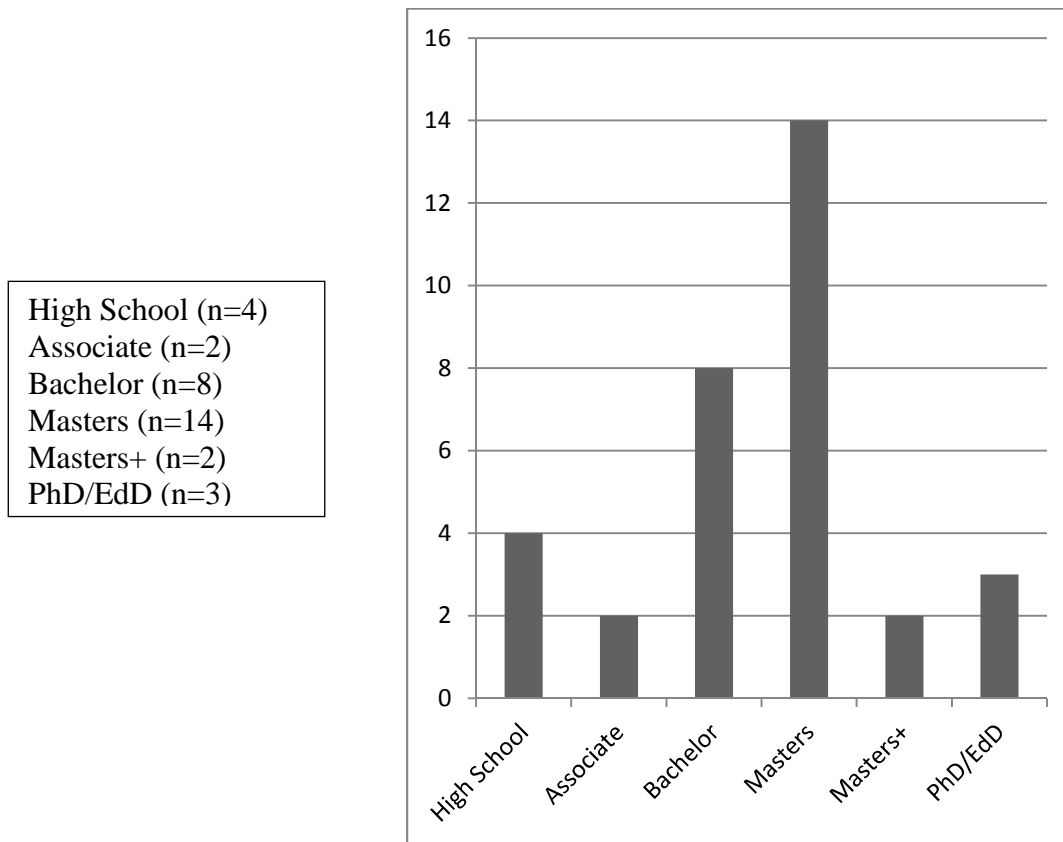
Thanks again,

Jack Beckerle, MA, MBA

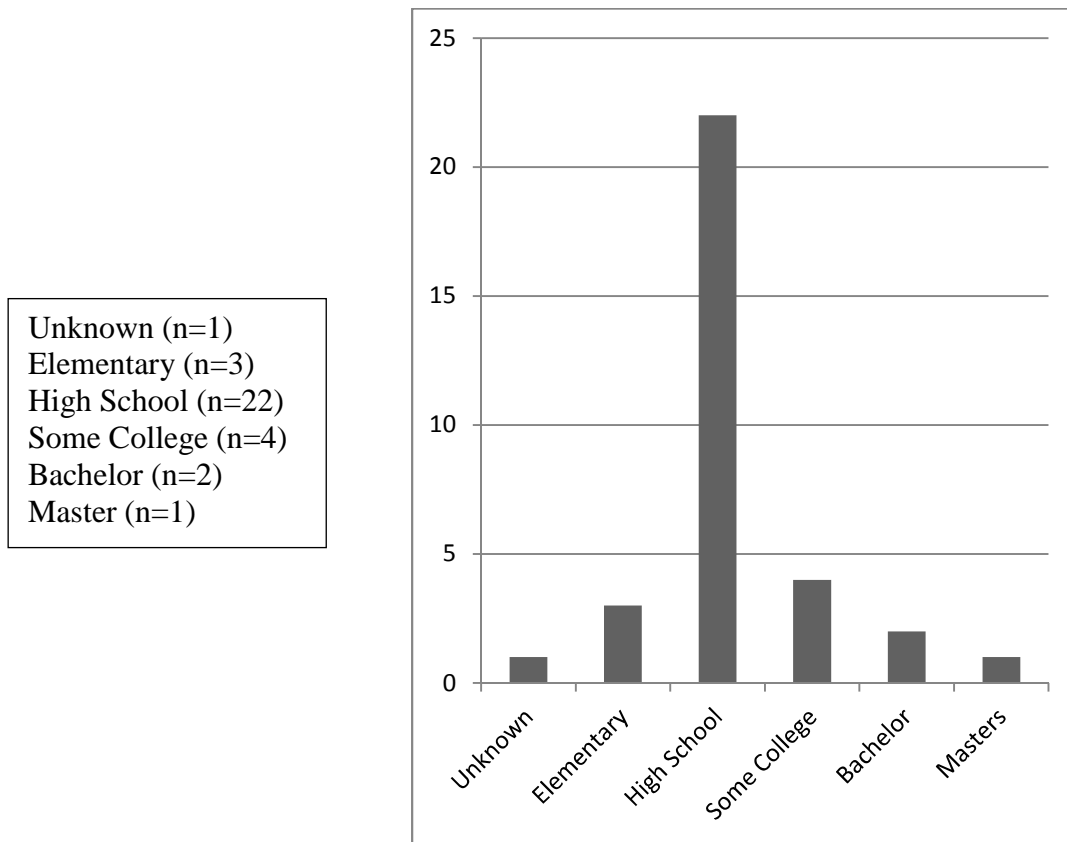
Associate Professor

Lindenwood University

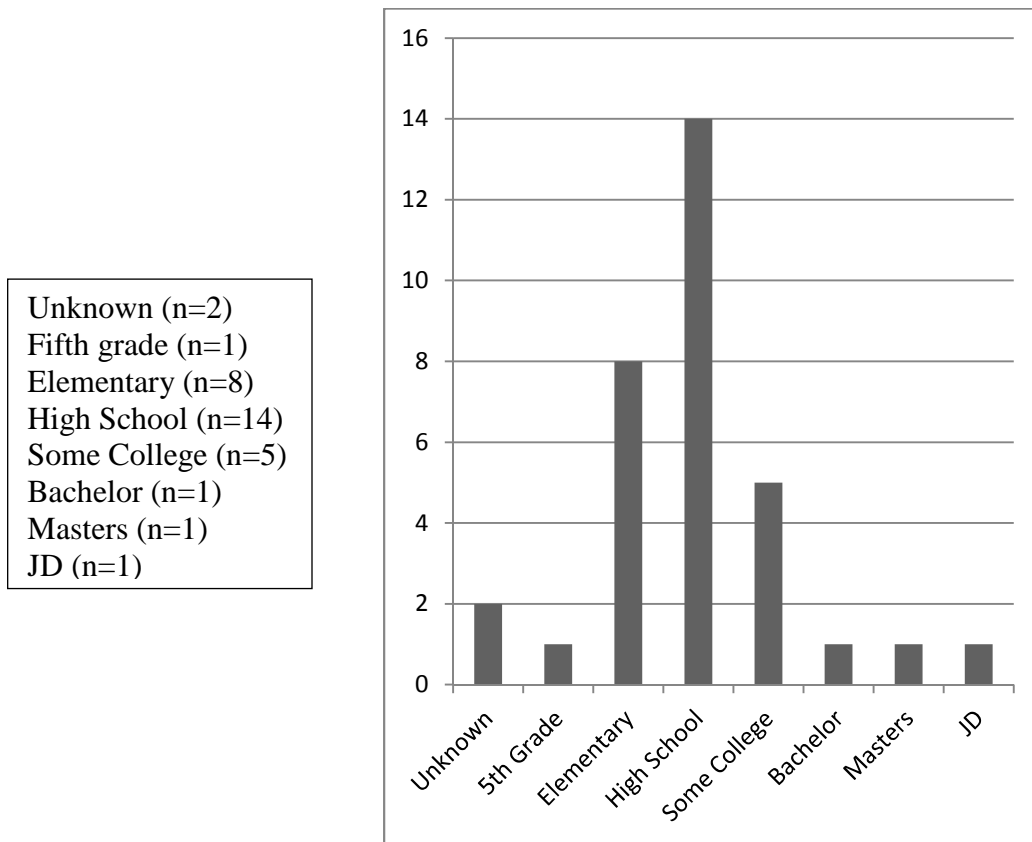
jbeckerle@lindenwood.edu

Appendix E**Aggregate Questionnaire Question 1 Responses****What is your level of education?**

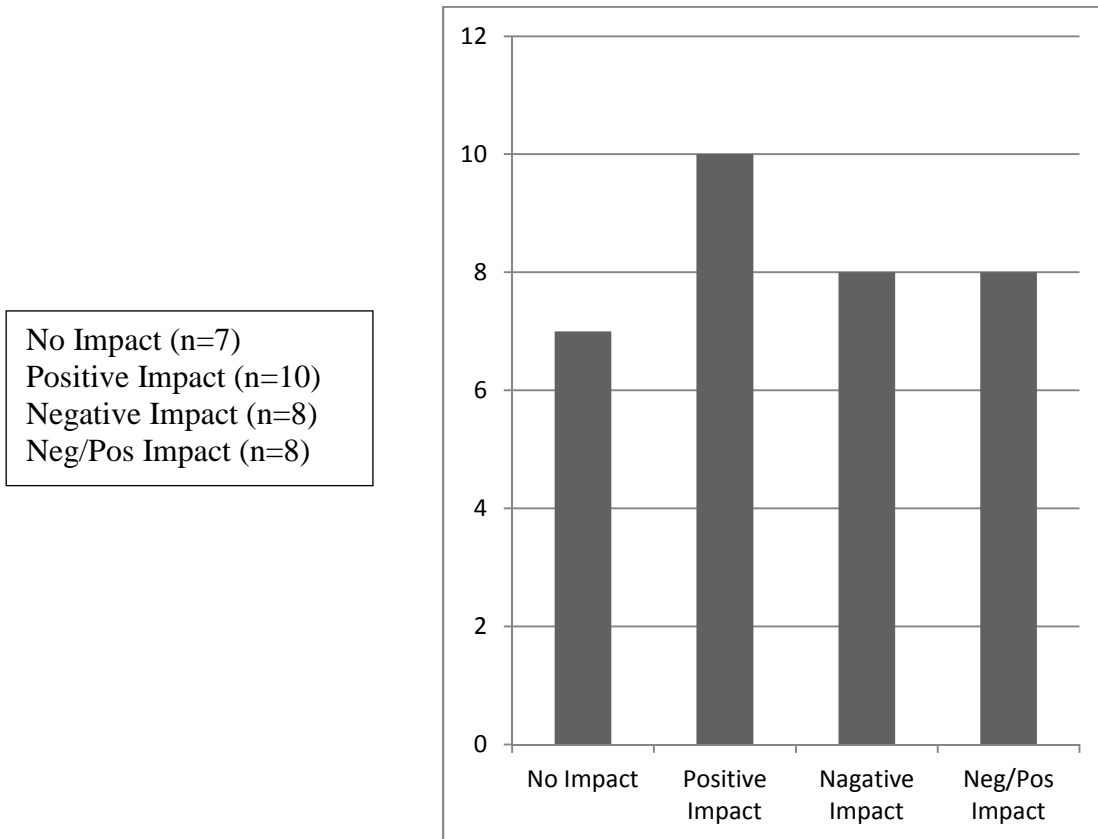
Note. The vertical axis is number participant responses. There were a total of 33 responses to this question.

Appendix F**Aggregate Questionnaire Question 7 Responses****What was your mother's level of education?**

Note. The vertical axis is number participant responses. There were a total of 33 responses to this question.

Appendix G**Aggregate Questionnaire Question 7 Responses****What was your father's level of education?**

Note. The vertical axis is number participant responses. There were a total of 33 responses to this question.

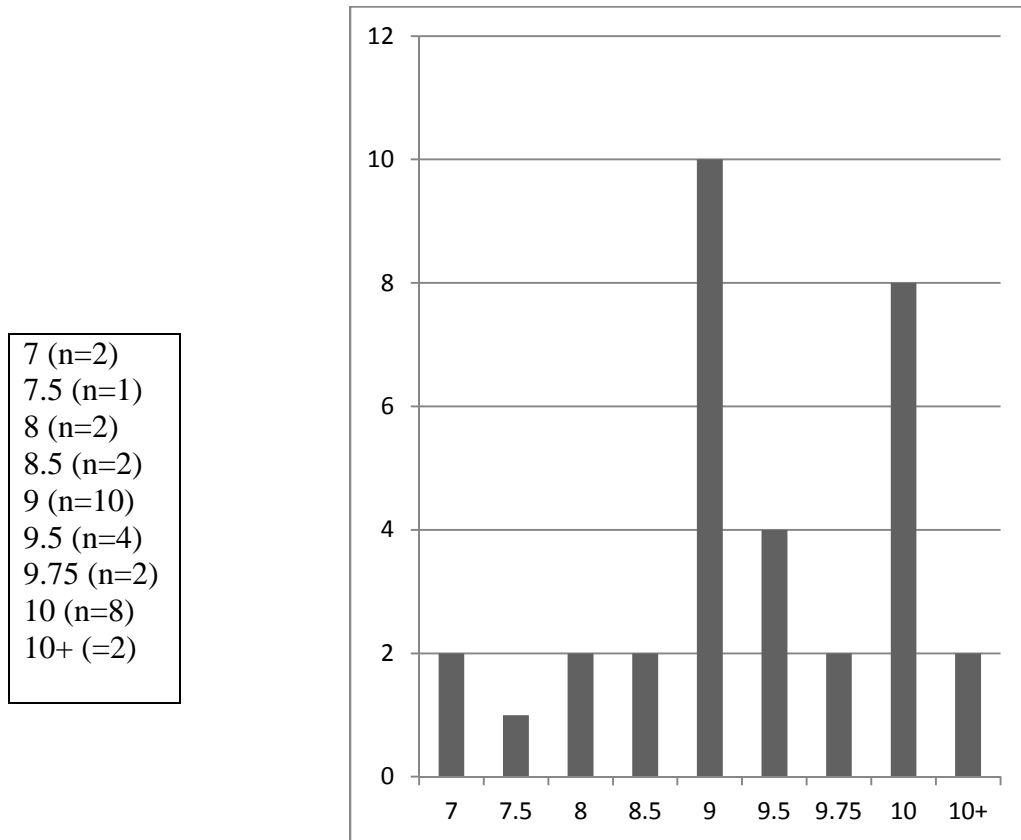
Appendix H**Aggregate Questionnaire Question 12 Responses****What was lifetime effect of the gifted program?**

Note. The vertical axis is number participant responses. There were a total of 33 responses to this question.

Appendix I

Aggregate Interview Question 12 Responses

How would you rate your life on a scale of 1–10 with 10 being the most successful?



Note. The vertical axis is number participant responses. There were a total of 33 responses to this question.

Vitae

John (Jack) Beckerle is an Associate Professor of Nonprofit Administration and serves as Chair of the Fire and Paramedic degree program at Lindenwood University. He teaches a full class schedule and as Chair of one of the fastest growing degree programs on campus, Beckerles' responsibilities include advising and counseling students as well as dealing with two off-site facilities that provide training for the fire and paramedic students. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration, a Masters of Art degree in Nonprofit Administration, a Masters of Business Administration degree and anticipates completing his Doctor of Education in October of 2013.

Prior to his teaching responsibilities, Beckerle was responsible for recruiting students for two Lindenwood satellite campuses as well as providing in-house classes at businesses in the area. Prior to his current duties at Lindenwood he held a variety of management positions in distribution, logistics and the retail industry. Beckerle also has shown the ability to build teams and develop personnel. He has experience in procurement, facilities management, human resources, transportation, risk management, and strategic planning.

In the community, Jack serves on committees and boards of the Campus YMCA at Lindenwood University and the Greater St. Louis Area Council, Boy Scouts of America. At Lindenwood he serves on the Presidents Athletic Advisory Committee and the Academic Standards Committee as well as being Faculty Advisor for the Alpha PHI Omega National Service Fraternity and the Student Athlete Advisory Committee. He was also voted Professor of the year twice at Lindenwood University.